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Declaration

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction with coffeehouse service can grow beyond just the coffee. The customers see employees, the processes, the physical environment and the information technology as a uniform service process. A dissertation to view the issues in the Starbucks system between customer service quality and customer satisfaction and to critically analyse them. It is interpretive, deductive and secondary and is analysed using both SERVQUAL and Expectation Confirmation Theory as lenses. Using a documented structured search, I found 78 records of which 34 were empirical studies and constitute the core thematic set. Foundational theory, research-method sources and clearly labelled Starbucks corporate records provided additional context.

The following themes emerged from the reflexive thematic analysis: multidimensional service quality with unequal effects, expectation confirmation, a premium consistency gap, interaction between human service and physical Servicescape, and digital convenience and fulfilment friction, and operational importance of capacity and recovery and cross-store consistency. Prior to the evidence of satisfaction, perceived service quality is highlighted by the synthesis as being an important determinant of satisfaction and as a way of interpreting satisfaction; however, the overwhelmingly cross-sectional nature of evidence does not result in establishing a universal causality between the two. Reliability and responsiveness are always present and protect the base promise, assurance, empathy and tangibles are more salient depending on the channel and the purpose of the visit and occurrence of the problem. If it doesn't deliver on what's advertised in the digital quality, it doesn't mean anything.

The dissertation proposes a service specification and a service promise, which are different for each channel, queue management based on capacity, transparent progress information, empowered first-contact recovery, integrated and joined-up digital and store governance, and purpose-fitted Servicescapes in combination with holistic and balanced customer-operational-employee learning. Its primary offering is that it is a combined framework that brings together SERVQUAL to show which aspects of the customer experience customers judge, Expectation-Confirmation Theory to show how the performance contributes to the satisfaction, and the customer journey to show where the value and/or failure occurs. Future research could explore this proposed premium consistency gap and digital fulfilment paradox by employing the longitudinal, multi-country and quasi-experimental designs.

Keywords: *Starbucks; customer service quality; customer satisfaction; customer experience; Omnichannel service.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Customer satisfaction is a critical issue in service management because when customers receive the service, they judge the service in terms of how they got it, when they got it and where they got it. Thus, service quality is more of a multi-dimensional evaluation than a straightforward evaluation of a product's performance. The literature on services as a basis for the philosophy of the service defines technical outcomes from the functional delivery and illustrates how reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible cues influence perceptions of excellence (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). There is a conceptual distinction between satisfaction and satisfaction is related but an evaluative response would be developed as a result of comparison between the experienced performance and prior expectations (Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 2014). It is significant because a customer might know how to identify good service but not be pleased when it is not up to the level of the brand.

This is particularly relevant in the coffeehouse context where a fairly homogenous product is experienced as part of the social service encounter. Customers interact with people, line-ups, environments, online ordering and more customers as they make up one journey. Research in restaurants, therefore, reveals that food or beverage quality, employee service and the physical environment can each influence satisfaction and intentions to return to the restaurant, but their relative importance is dependent on the type of restaurant and customer segment (Namkung and Jang, 2007; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012; Zhong and Moon, 2020). Customer experience scholarship builds on this point and considers experience as a response – not as the result of one single transaction – across the connected touch points (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; De Keyser et al., 2020).

Starbucks is an analytically useful case because of the combination of coffee, employee interaction, recognisable store environment and an increasingly digital relationship. The brand's positioning as a “third place” has led to the association of the company with a space that is neither home nor office, and the fact that ordering is conducted via mobile, a rewards program and delivery further expanded the service system beyond the cafe

(Schultz and Gordon, 2011; Starbucks Corporation, 2025a). While these channels can enhance access and convenience, they also make service quality interdependent. A mobile order that is accurate, but then has a delay in collection, is no better than a slow order whilst one that is fulfilled quickly but has a non-personal interaction, or the wrong type of environment, is no better in the store. The customer thus decides the coherence of the system as a whole.

This level of coherence is now of a strategic importance. Starbucks's 2024 financial statements referred to an "challenged customer experience", and further operational messages focused on streamlined procedures, more personnel to assist, queue lines with tools and measures to improve the "customer experience" and ensure employees reacted in a more uniform fashion (Starbucks Corporation, 2024; Starbucks, 2024; Starbucks, 2026b). These are company reported evaluations and are not considered a standalone measure of satisfaction. They do however suggest that speed, operational flow, employee support and human connection have been deemed by the organisation to be interconnected managerial issues. The case then serves as an up-to-the-minute context for the analysis of the applicability of the existing theory of service quality to a combination of a physical and digital services model.

1.2 Research problem

However, there is no shortage of studies linking service quality to satisfaction in the academic arena. Instead, the evidence is scattered across constructs, countries and channels. Research that is specific to Starbucks has studied the concept of perceived value, experiential loyalty, brand image and product attributes and co-creation of Starbucks products as well, mostly with a cross-sectional survey in a single national market (e.g., Wu, 2017; Ge et al., 2021; Albuquerque and Ferreira, 2022; Lee, Jung and Moon, 2022). Transferable insights can be offered by wider research of restaurants and digital services, but it cannot be assumed to be Starbucks customers. Furthermore, results do not indicate that each dimension of service has the same or pervasive influence. There are a number of studies in which the atmosphere in the store is a significant factor, but some evidence from the coffee shop industry suggests it is less influential after the consideration of value and product (Dhisasmito and Kumar, 2020;

Tran, Dang and Tournois, 2020). A critical synthesis, however, is needed to determine strong patterns, clarify discrepancies, and be wary of making the leap from correlation to causation.

The managerial issue is a result of the same fragmentation. An international brand should provide enough consistency to the promise and be flexible about the variations in store format, demand, culture and channel utilisation. Technology investments can boost convenience, while reducing interpersonal attention or adding to the load. More customisation can add in perceived relevance but also complexity and variability. The question is then no longer whether or not the quality of service is of importance in theory, but which aspects are of importance, how, which conditions, and what are the implications for the Starbucks service system.

1.3 Research aim

This study seeks to critically analyse the effect of customer service quality on customer satisfaction in Starbucks by performing a detailed analysis of secondary data and current literature.

1.4 Research objectives

1. To critically discuss the idea of customer service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality and coffeehouse sector.
2. To analyse the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction according to the theories and models in the service marketing field.
3. To determine the effect of various aspects of service quality on customer satisfaction in Starbucks.
4. To evaluate the latest evidence related to the customer service strategies and customer experience initiatives of Starbucks.
5. To identify gaps in the literature and suggest recommendations which can be implemented to improve the customer satisfaction by improving the service quality.

1.5 Research questions

Primary Question:

What is the influence of the quality of customer service on customer satisfaction in the Starbucks's system?

Sub Questions:

1. What are the key aspects of customer service quality in the literature?
2. What is the relationship between the quality of the services provided and the satisfaction of customers in the coffeehouse business?
3. What kind of evidence is there indicating there is a relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Starbucks?
4. What issues does Starbucks get into when it comes to ensuring the quality of service standards?
5. What are some ways that Starbucks can increase the quality of their service to the customers to increase customer satisfaction?

1.6 Scope and Significance of the Study

The dissertation includes qualitative but no new surveys, interviews or experiments. It focuses on peer-reviewed evidence published from 2020 to 2026, and includes earlier evidence as long as it is foundational for the theory or measurement. Starbucks publications and financial reports are utilized in the context of declared strategy and operational context, but not as an unbiased indicator of customer results. The study concentrates on service quality and satisfaction towards the customer, and product quality, price, brand image and brand culture are only dealt with when they influence this relationship. It doesn't seek to value financially or conduct an audit or causal test of individual initiatives at the country level.

The study is novel in merging two explanations. The SERVQUAL attributes are the ones that customers judge the delivery by, while the Expectation-Confirmation Theory is an understanding of why the same delivery can result in different satisfaction judgements from the customer. This positioning of these theories in a physical-digital customer journey also fills a practical gap between traditional face-to-face measurement and today's Omnichannel service. The resulting analysis will provide information to inform decisions on operational consistency, employee enablement, service recovery and technology and should not be interpreted as a single standardised intervention being suitable for all stores.

The aim of the contribution is analytical and not promotional. Starbucks is not necessarily representative of the coffeehouse industry overall, and a growth in a brand and the participation of customers does not necessarily equate to customer satisfaction. The case: Rather the case is used to explore how a well-known service promise and the actual service delivery variability on the front line in a changing service economy intersect.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the critical analysis of the conceptualisation, measurement and linkage of service quality and customer satisfaction in service, hospitality and coffeehouse research is the main focus. First, it introduces the two constructs, then examines the two key lenses of the dissertation: SERVQUAL and Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT). It then examines the physical, interpersonal and digital aspects of the customer's journey at Starbucks and contrasts the Starbucks-specific evidence with evidence from related contexts. The aim is not to stack studies reporting positive relationships but to uncover 'how', 'when' and 'why' mechanisms, and to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in the existing evidence.

2.2 Service quality and customer satisfaction

Service quality is a commonly known perception of overall service by the customer. Gronroos (1984) divides the technical quality (the amount of what is delivered) from functional quality (how it is delivered). Instead, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) define perceived quality as the difference between service expectations and service experiences, which was later operationalized by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), through SERVQUAL. Brady and Cronin (2001) side with one part of this debate and develop a hierarchical model where interaction quality, physical-environment and outcome quality are all part of an overall assessment. In all of these accounts, quality isn't something that is objective and is completely under the control of the organisation; it is a perception that is shaped when someone interacts with quality: people, processes and quality evidence.

Customer satisfaction typically refers to a customer's evaluation after consumption. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory suggests that the customer's satisfaction is determined by how well the product's performance matches his or her preconceptions, or expectations (Oliver, 1980). Later research considers satisfaction as cumulative and transaction specific which means that previous contacts can affect the final judgment, thus creating a more lasting impression (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Fornell et al.,

1996; Oliver, 2014). Meta-analytic results show that all three are important, but there is some variability in the results depending on the measurement(s) and research design(s) used (Szymanski and Henard, 2001).

The constructs are thus not interchangeable but are related. Satisfaction can precede perceived quality and perceived quality can also impact subsequent overall assessments of the provider. Cronin and Taylor (1992) challenged the expectation minus performance measurement and obtained a better support for service quality measurement based on performance. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) later associated positive quality perceptions to behavioural intentions, which is not the same as actual loyalty. The reality is that it is not enough for a business to meet compliance with its operational procedures for it to be satisfied. While a customer may get a correct order and be unhappy due to delay, value concerns or an unfriendly response, a competent recovery can result in an acceptable evaluation following the first failure.

2.3 SERVQUAL as attribute framework

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), perceptions of service quality are divided into five categories reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Reliability is to do things right or to perform accurately and dependably; responsiveness is to respond promptly; assurance is to be competent, courteous and confident; empathy is to be attentive and concern is to be individual; and tangibles are physical resources such as facilities, equipment and appearance. At Starbucks, these dimensions come down to preparing the coffee correctly, having reliable collection times, staff who are knowledgeable and respectful, individual needs are recognized, and a clean and functional environment is provided for the service.

The ongoing usefulness of the framework is the diagnostic vocabulary. It should stimulate analysis of both process and evidence, and the dimensions align easily with process failures that are visible to the customer. Later development of the scale further elucidates that the authors did not have measurement as a fixed and universal instrument, but rather as a subject that was open to reassessment (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1991). An extensive review by Ladhari 2009 indicated that there was a wide range of cross-sector use, but also significant variations in dimensionality and wording of items and what

was being measured. This variation undermines arguments for trans-cultural and trans-service translation of the original scale.

There are three criticisms that are pertinent to the present study. First, the subtraction of expectation scores from performance scores can lead to reliability and interpretation issues, so SERVPERF's "pure" performance-only alternative is an important counter position (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Second, the five dimensions don't explicitly stand out for quality of food or beverages, fairness of prices, presence of other customers or digital interfaces. Some of these aspects of the sector specificity are covered by implementing restaurant models like DINESERV and DINESCAPE which adapt service and physical-environment indicators (Stevens, Knutson and Patton, 1995; Ryu and Jang, 2008). Thirdly, SERVQUAL may be an episodic phenomenon if the contemporary experience takes place along a journey. A mobile order traverses interface, payment, production, queue, possible recovery; a failure in one step alters the interpretation of a different step.

SERVQUAL does not become obsolete due to these limitations. They says it should be used here as an analytical classification, not as a statement that five reflective variables will account for all the Starbucks outcomes. When a customer is seeking advice or recovery, reliability and responsiveness might be more noticeable during fulfilment, while assurance and empathy might be more noticeable when a customer is seeking advice. The "third place" may be important to the tangibles, but is less important to a delivery customer. The framework therefore has to be interpreted in the context.

The choice of the measurement also influences the relative importance of each dimension. The units are not the same as the respondent may rate an encounter, a store or the brand. Asking about an actual Starbucks visit can report an actual service quality but not cumulative trust; asking about Starbucks in general can allow brand attitude to colour the service quality that is reported. Affect, cognitive evaluation or intention, or loyalty (as an outcome measure) all have been used as scales of satisfaction. The need for a broader measure of the customer experience was stimulated by the fact that traditional quality scales were not able to sufficiently measure the full experience, as explained by Klaus and Maklan (2013). Their work is of value, but, as in the case of broad experience, the nature of their work can be hard to distinguish from satisfaction. In the

current review, therefore, only those studies are given the greatest weight that define the constructs that constitute the focal constructs, and which maintain differences between satisfaction, value, trust and loyalty.

2.4 Expectation-Confirmation Theory as a process explanation

ECT complements SERVQUAL as it explains the process for converting the perceptions of the attributes into the satisfaction judgements. This is because expectations create a standard of comparison, perceived performance is compared with the expectations and confirmation or disconfirmation leads to satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). The quality might be tough for a well-known brand. Customers can anticipate recognition, precise customisation, comfortable atmosphere, and speedy fulfilment all concurrently. This can cause greater negative disconfirmation at Starbucks if the customer thinks the company has guaranteed equal convenience.

ECT also provides an understanding of why the same service can elicit varying responses. A mobile customer before work might care more about getting the job done on time, while a customer who uses the cafe socially might care more about the comfort of seating, ambience and interpersonal warmth. The standard used is influenced by prior experience, price paid, situational urgency and brand communication. Another aspect of cumulative satisfaction is that a failure is not judged in isolation but in the context of an encounter history (Oliver, 2014). A successful recovery will change the assessment, but if it works repeatedly, then future expectations may be less positive or a switch in made.

The theory has some flaws. Expectations are challenging to define as there may be predictive, desired and minimum tolerable expectations. Sometimes, expectation and satisfaction are measured cross-sectionally, which means that the temporal direction is not clear. In addition, ECT may overemphasise a person's thoughts on their own cognitive comparison and underemphasize the emotional, social, and material restraints. The relevance of these omissions is brought to the fore in the literature on the customer experience, which considers experience as subjective, contextual and spread across touch points (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020). Therefore, ECT is a process lens for this particular dissertation, accounting for the importance of perceived performance, whereas SERVQUAL identifies salient features of perceived performance.

In addition, there is a qualification of emotions. When restaurant experiences provoke pleasure, frustration, embarrassment, or relief, it's before the customer has made an intentional comparison. In the work of Jang and Namkung (2009), there is a direct relationship between perceived quality and perceived emotional response, which in turn are linked to behavioural intentions, and in the study of customer experience, the cognitive, emotional, sensory, and social responses are taken into account (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). As for the emotions part of the disconfirmation reaction, they can be accepted as an element in the reaction, but it is not necessary to imply a precise difference score calculation for the customer. Starbucks may feel like it has been wronged before a queue is evaluated, and the genuine repentance can alter the emotional significance of a mistake. The qualitative synthesis is therefore not simply a subtraction of perceptions, but a process of sense making.

Table 1. Comparative role of SERVQUAL and Expectation-Confirmation Theory

Lens	Primary question	Key elements	Analytical value	Principal limitation
SERVQUAL	What aspects of delivery are judged?	Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles	Provides a diagnostic attribute vocabulary for physical and interpersonal service	Dimensionality and expectation-gap scores vary by context; digital and product factors are not explicit
ECT	How does performance become satisfaction?	Expectation, perceived performance, confirmation or disconfirmation	Explains different reactions to the same performance and the effect of a premium promise	Expectation standards are multiple and often measured retrospectively
Integrated use	Where and why does satisfaction form?	Attributes across the customer journey interpreted against a situated promise	Connects employee, operational, physical and digital touchpoints	Conceptual integration requires empirical testing; it is not a proven causal model

Source: Adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), Oliver (1980), Cronin and Taylor (1992), Ladhari (2009), Kotler, Keller and Chernev (2022), and Wirtz and Lovelock (2022).

2.5 From encounter quality to customer journey

According to the service-dominant logic, value is created in the use and interaction, and is not just in the product (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). When customers value the beverage, the environment, the time, the social purpose and digital tools, this is the ideal job for them to have in a coffeehouse. Verhoef et al. (2009) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) also propose that there are direct and indirect touch points that occur before, during and after purchase, where experience is built. Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl (2017) explain how culture is manifested at a management level, and that this is more about mindsets, strategic direction and organisational capabilities, than about individual customer-focused tactics.

A trip perspective addresses two dangers inherent in traditional service quality measurement, namely: First, it will collect spillover: a simple application interface can create demand that leads to overcrowding and uncertainty in the handoff. Second, it acknowledges touch points that are not within the control of the organisation, such as delivery partners, other customers and social media. Another naming system that suggests this is the Touch points-Context-Qualities proposed by De Keyser et al. (2020) which calls for researchers to articulate what customers come into contact with, the context in which this occurs, and the qualities of the resulting response. Despite the above, there is still a lack of homogeneity in how researchers carry out customer-journey research, both in terms of the unit of analysis and methodology (Tueanrat, Papagiannidis and Alamanos, 2021). Journey terminology should then refine causal thinking, not be a pretty label.

Organisational alignment is also essential for a good CXM experience. A study by Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl (2017) demonstrates that structures, capabilities and governance are determining an experience orientation, rather than only frontline behaviour. This is also echoed by the hospitality synthesis by Kandampully, Zhang and Jaakkola (2018) that brings employee engagement, technology and value co-creation together in a holistic agenda. This is crucial for Starbucks because no single barista is able to manage the app, the products, how the staff is deployed, and the store design. Focusing only on individual actions would be to misidentify what's visible as a point of

failure with its organisational cause. The literature thus lends support to analysis at three levels: the encounter as experienced by the customer, the travel that links the encounters, and the operating system that enables and/or limits the delivery.

2.6 Interpersonal service, product and perceived value

Overall, results from the restaurant sample are supportive of the general hypothesis of a relationship between employee service and satisfaction; however, results also suggest that service is not the only factor that is part of the evaluation. Namkung and Jang (2007) show that food quality contributes to satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Ha and Jang (2010) report that service and food quality are embedded in an atmospheric dimension, and Jang and Namkung (2009) find a connection between perceived quality and emotions and behavioural intentions. In quick-casual restaurants, food, service, and physical-environment quality are found to impact outcomes, and perceived price conditions evaluation, by Ryu and Han (2010). Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012) situate image and perceived value in the same network.

This evidence warns to not assume that customer service is the sole source of satisfaction. A good pal can't make up for a substandard drink and a technically correct drink is no good if the price seems too high. This contextual role is supported by Starbucks specific research. According to the study by Lee et al., (2022), taste, customisation, health-related perceptions and price fairness are antecedents of perceived coffee quality and resultant brand outcomes. In their research on Starbucks Reserve stores in Shanghai, Ge et al. (2021) relate perceived service quality and perceived value to satisfaction and differentiate between utilitarian and symbolic value. The results validate an integrated account, but are only from one brand format and market, so cannot be generalised.

In spite of this, relational attributes are also critical as they affect not only assessment of function but also assessment of emotions. At a coffee shop, responsiveness is taking the time to recognize a customer waiting in line and establish realistic expectations, rather than just churning them out quickly. Assurance – knowledge of products and confidence regarding allergens/customisation. Empathy means understanding how the customer is feeling, but not making them feel like you are familiar with them. Starbucks customers are

applied to examine the relationship between service quality and loyalty and co-creation behaviour in this study by Albuquerque and Ferreira (2022) while Wu (2017) examines the relationship between experiential quality, value, trust, and satisfaction with experiential loyalty in Taiwan. Both of these studies suggest that interaction adds value over and above the actual transaction, but they both rely on self-reported cross-sectional data and are not able to show that service changes lead to later service behaviour.

2.7 Servicescape and the “third place”

Bitner (1992) presented a Servicescape framework to explain how the ambient conditions, spatial layout, signs and artefacts influence customer and employee responses. The concept of construct has been extended to the restaurant field; aesthetic, light, seating, clean, and social density are domains of the restaurant environment that have been included in the construct (Ryu and Jang, 2008; Kim and Moon, 2009). Pizam and Tasci (2019) suggest that the source of hospitality experience is multifaceted and encompasses various actors and senses, cultural and social factors. The relevance to Starbucks is that much of Starbucks' proposition is experienced physically, and is not simply a receptacle for exchange of the beverage.

Evidence is not uniform, however. Tran et al (2020) conclude that the combination of Servicescape and social interaction makes customers' service experience in Vietnamese coffee stores. Store atmosphere, on the other hand, was not found to directly influence their model of loyalty within the context of satisfaction, service quality, and other variables in a coffee shop in Jakarta (as found by Dhisasmito and Kumar, 2020). The differences could be due to either measurement, or market, or purpose of visit, or mediation, and not only because they are a contradiction. There are ways by which a takeaway customer uses a store in different ways to a remote worker and a social group. Crowding can make some customers feel happy and popular and make other customers feel frustrated. In the literature, Servicescape is thus presented as a contingent influence, rather than a universal dominant influence.

Starbucks' announced "return to" the coffeehouse atmosphere and "stay a while" ethos therefore should be assessed on the basis of the "operation fit. What could make a tangible and an empathetic, may also simultaneously make a responsive and low feeling

of control, if that's how it happens. If it's so, seating and hospitality may enhance tangibles and empathy, while a crowded pickup area may reduce responsiveness and feeling of control. The theoretical issue is fit - physical design, demand pattern, intended customer purpose.

2.8 Digital and Omnichannel service quality

The digital channels play expand the relevant dimensions of quality. The Efficiency Dimension, System Availability Dimension, Fulfilment Dimension and the Privacy Dimension are identified by E-S-QUAL and the recovery scale for the problems by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra (2005). As mentioned above, later hierarchical goals involve website design, further, customer service, fulfilment and security/privacy (Blut, 2016). Similarly, e-service quality is linked to satisfaction and online behavioural outcomes by Rita, Oliveira and Farisa (2019). According to these models, customer satisfaction can be influenced by stability, ease of availability, payment confidence, accuracy of their orders and safe handheld recovery before they even get to the store.

Mobile experience is not just about usability of interface. McLean, Al-Nabhani and Wilson (2018) indicate that usefulness, ease, customisation and enjoyment leads to the retail-app experience, and Vakulenko et al. (2019) demonstrate that the degrees of the fulfilment and the last mile delivery leads to the retail satisfaction. Prasetyo et al., (2021) found that in food delivery, customer service and control and fulfilment both have an impact on the customer's satisfaction and intended reuse while food quality had a direct effect (Annaraud and Berezina, 2020). Suhartanto et al. (2019) also highlight the importance of the e-service and food quality in delivery loyalty. These studies focus on other contexts, and as such must be imported carefully, but they show a general rule: "Customers get the promise of a digital service, and they get the reality of that service, in the physical world.

This is convenient and "chops" at the same time for Starbucks. Mobile ordering can decrease ordering effort and facilitate personalisation, while delay in collection time or with heavy traffic collection area can be an eroding of the convenience promise. When adding a delivery step, there is an additional controlled by partners where beverage conditions and on-time delivery could influence the brand assessment. There's also been

research that reveals differences between online-outlets, as seen in the study of coffee shops where different evaluative patterns are exhibited across outlets (Tao and Kim, 2022). Digital service quality can then be considered as a form of reliability and responsiveness throughout channels plus interface quality, privacy and handoff integrity.

The same care has to be taken when implementing automation. While AI can be used for prediction, personalization, and employees' decision-making processes, the "optimum fit" will help to maximize the technology's strategic value and ensure trust (Huang and Rust, 2021). While the advantages for being more efficient are noticeable, there are also questions regarding the adoption of service-robots: social, ethical and acceptance-related questions (Wirtz et al., 2018). Starbucks has implemented the Starbucks Green dot for Assisting™ and the Smart Queue systems; while descriptions report intended or early operational benefit, quantum descriptions do not report independently evaluated satisfaction effects (Starbucks, 2025; Starbucks, 2026b).

2.9 Empirical synthesis and unresolved issues

There are three tentative claims that can be made based on the combined literature. Perceived service quality positively correlates with satisfaction, value, or favourable intentions in most of the Starbucks and coffee-shop studies and restaurant studies (Qin and Prybutok, 2009; Zhong and Moon, 2020; Ge et al., 2021). Second, if the service promise places a strong focus on convenience and uniformity, reliability and responsiveness will be more critical. Thirdly, strength and form of association are influenced by product quality, price, Servicescape, channel, and purpose of customers and cultural context.

All three propositions are linked with service recovery. Failure brings to light reliability, quick response acknowledges responsiveness, knowledgeable assistance provides a measure of assurance, respectful discretion brings empathy into the mix, and the actual pathway (physical or digital) to help is a form of tangible evidence. Under this circumstance, recovery can more clearly show the cohesion of the service system, which is more obvious than routine delivery. However, the focus of the Starbucks specific corpus is more on normal performance, loyalty and experiences than complaint journeys. The imbalance is important, since a normal satisfaction model can be used to mask the high-

risk customers. It can also undermine inferences regarding the possibility of a successful failure counterintuitively recuperating confirmation, or repeated failures tending to weaken cumulative trust.

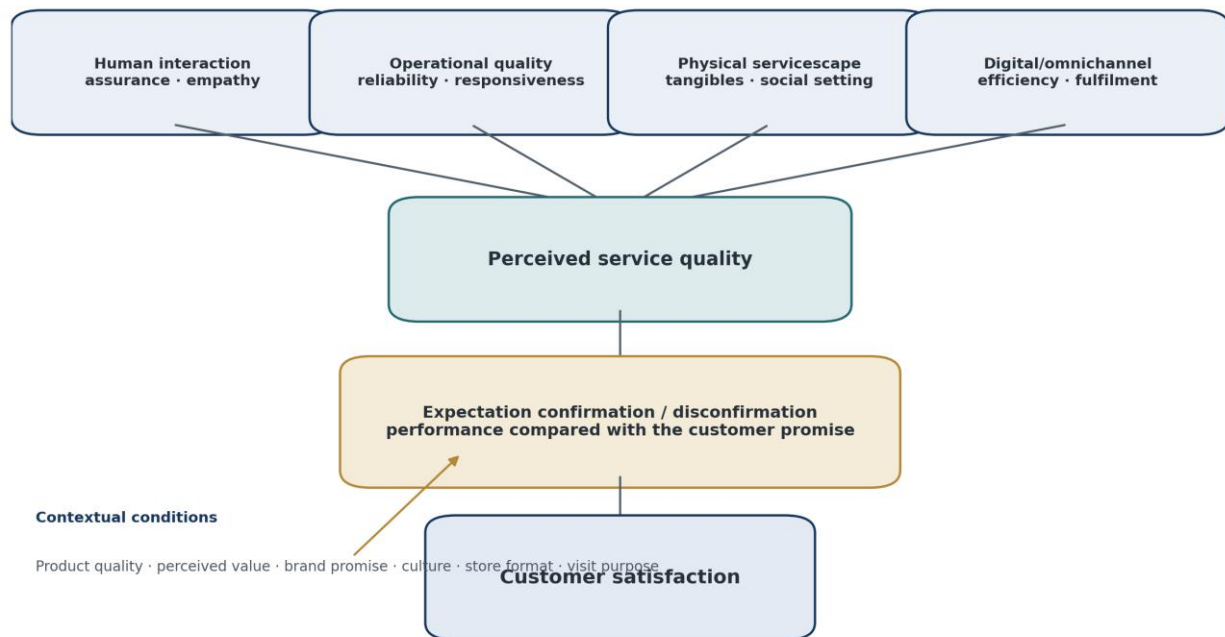
However, there are weaknesses common to the evidence. A typical empirical study would rely on convenience sampling, a single market and a self-reported constructs measured at one point in time. Both common method variance and reverse direction are possible. Although meaning is different, satisfaction and loyalty are sometimes used interchangeably; and intention is often used as an indicator of behaviour. When an item is removed from the scale, without revalidating the construct meaning. Also positive path coefficients are more likely to be foregrounded than null or conditional findings. However, experiential studies in the recent past demonstrate the significance of the sensory, affective and relational components, as the ranking between the different components of the services depends on the context (Meeprom and Kokkhangplu, 2025).

In addition, there is a substantial difference between the findings of conventional encounter studies and the workings of the Omnichannel coffee service. Not many studies of Starbucks have used composer animality or physical environment in a single design. Both corporate initiatives and academic studies exist, but are variously self-reported and may fall behind in the wake of management shuffles. If one form of evidence complements the other, a qualitative synthesis process can fill the gap between these forms of evidence, with the dignity of distinguishing from Organisational claims empirical support, and still respect the limits of transfer from neighbouring industries.

2.10 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of the dissertation gives special attention to interpersonal, operational and physical and digital service attributes as factors influencing perceived service quality. This performance is correlated with the customer's expectations rooted in the brand promise, price, previous experience and situation need. The effect of the relation between confirmation/disconfirmation and satisfaction is modified by product quality, perceived value, culture, store format and purpose of visit. Though satisfaction can foster loyalty or advocacy behavior, these behaviors are not assumed to be the dependent construct but rather a consequence of satisfaction.

Figure 1. Integrated service-quality and expectation-confirmation framework



Source: Adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), Oliver (1980), Lemon and Verhoef (2016), and De Keyser et al. (2020).

The framework is deductive as its main categories are based on SERVQUAL and ECT. It will continue to be interpretive in nature as is the nature of analysis, as it will be a consideration of what the studies have done to make and describe those categories, and not a statistical examination of a pre-established format. It also avoids conceptual drift out of control digital quality and Servicescape are no dependent variables when customer journey is regarded as their manifestation and heterogeneity is described by the potential role of contextual variables.

The distinction helps to shield the examine from any filter affecting just one interaction with that specific touch point and the satisfaction at the final customer's end of the entire Starbucks experience.

2.11 Chapter summary

The quality of service and satisfaction are different yet related constructs. SERVQUAL provides an attribute-based description of delivery, whereas ECT provides an explanation of why perceived performance is an expectation-dependent evaluation. Research work in

restaurants, cafes and coffee-shops and from Starbuck's reveals a generally positive connection, while further indicating that this connection can shift from the product, value, environment, channel and context. The most crucial point is an integrated evaluation of the current Starbucks travel that equally analyses consistency, human exchange, space, fulfilment and recoupment on the digitized plane.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter engages with the question from the dissertation as to how it has addressed the research questions utilizing clear qualitative analysis of the secondary evidence. Displays the research philosophy, deductive logic, research design, search and selection procedure, data extraction, thematic analysis, quality safeguards, ethics and limitations. Since the research involves a mix of diverse academic studies and some organisational documents, and does not estimate a pooled effect, the method is clarified as a structured integrative review.

3.2 Research philosophy and approach

This is an interpretative study based on the interpretive philosophy. Customer satisfaction is not directly observed by the researcher but is an evaluative meaning. It can be interpreted depending on the previous expectation, the purpose of the visit, the cultural context, the channel and encounter history. Similarly, service quality is also a by-product of trilogies that are socially situated experiences with employees, technology, other customers and the environment. Interpretivism would therefore be suitable for analysing how this relationship is formed and explained in varying research studies, as well as the variable value given and why similar elements may be more significant in various scenarios (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

However, the dissertation applies the deductive reasoning method. Prior to analysis, SERVQUAL and ECT provided sensitising concepts in the following five dimensions: SERVQUAL - the five dimensions focused on customer-facing attributes, and ECT - attention was directed to expected performance, confirmation and satisfaction. Note that "deduction" does not refer to statistical hypothesis testing. That it included established theory as a starting point, a frame of analysis with which evidence was contrasted. The actual process was kept open to include themes that were not well developed in the existing models, and this included channels, operational capacity and service recovery. This mixing is valid because in a qualitative study, the data can be explained, variation,

not a universal numeric law, can be used as a basis for interpretation, and prior theory can be leveraged during the process.

3.3 Research design

Qualitative secondary-data design was the type of design used. No customer survey or interview, observation or experiment was carried out. The evidence included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books as sources of theory/methodology or official Starbucks reports or communications as sources for the current organisational context but on a restricted basis. The design allowed the comparison between markets and between service formats and prevented the appearance of breadth with a small primary convenience sample. It also met the aims of the research, which is to make a critical synthesis, not to estimate a population parameter.

The study adheres to the evidence-informed management reviews model: an explicit question, documented searching, reasoned inclusion criteria and structured extraction and critical synthesis (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003; Snyder, 2019). Integrative review logic was helpful as quantitative surveys could not be merged with conceptual papers or Organisational records by one statistical procedure (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005). Reporting of identification and screening was informed by PRISMA 2020 and the dissertation does not demand PRISMA compliance nor systematic-review status (Page et al., 2021).

3.4 Strategies for searching for and selecting evidence

These searches took place in July & August 2026. This academic discovery process involved checking across journal and DOI records of Google Scholar and publisher databases, and targeted checking within business, marketing and hospitality literature. The searches included all the following strings: service quality, customer satisfaction, Starbucks, coffee shop, restaurant, Servicescape, Starbucks, mobile ordering, e-service quality, restaurant, food delivery, customer experience, and service recovery were combined. For known models and pertinent empirical papers, backward and forward citation chaining has been used. Search was conducted on the official Starbucks investor page, and official corporate page for annual reports and for operational initiatives dated before the search took place.

A preference was shown for publications that were published between 2020 and 2026. Older work was used only if it provided a theory or method or scale or a directly relevant Starbucks finding not superseded by more recent research. To be included the bibliographic record had to be retrievable; the reference had to be to service quality or to satisfaction or to a mechanism closely related to them; the study had to provide a clear research context; and the method had to ensure there was enough information available for the claim to be judged. Wherever possible, peer-reviewed journal evidence was used, based on well-known or indexed marketing, service and retail/hospitality outlets. Corporate sources have only been used when the claim referred to Starbucks' announced performance, strategy or initiative.

Records were omitted if the citation could not be independently retrieved, when the methodological clarity of the outlet or study was limited, when the primary event was not related or when the report of the item was a press report itself and provided no rationale transfer to coffee service. The geographical radius of the empirical base of Starbucks is geographically limited, so for not all the resource the exact match to Starbucks was needed. But these were indirect Starbucks evidence, from restaurants, coffee stores and retail apps and online food delivery.

Searches were conducted in an iterative fashion, and not through a single export from a database. The initial broad combinations identified terminology and repetition that occurred in all journals; the latter were combinations of constructs and Starbucks, coffeehouse, restaurant/mobile contexts. The seminal foundations and newer papers in which relevant studies cited each other were then examined in the light of citation chaining. Each candidate was put in the ledger on one occasion and duplicates were minimized based on DOI, title and author checks. This process enhances traceability, but it can be the case that another search performed at some later point in time could return a different set of results – due to the fact that the databases have been personalised and indexes updated.

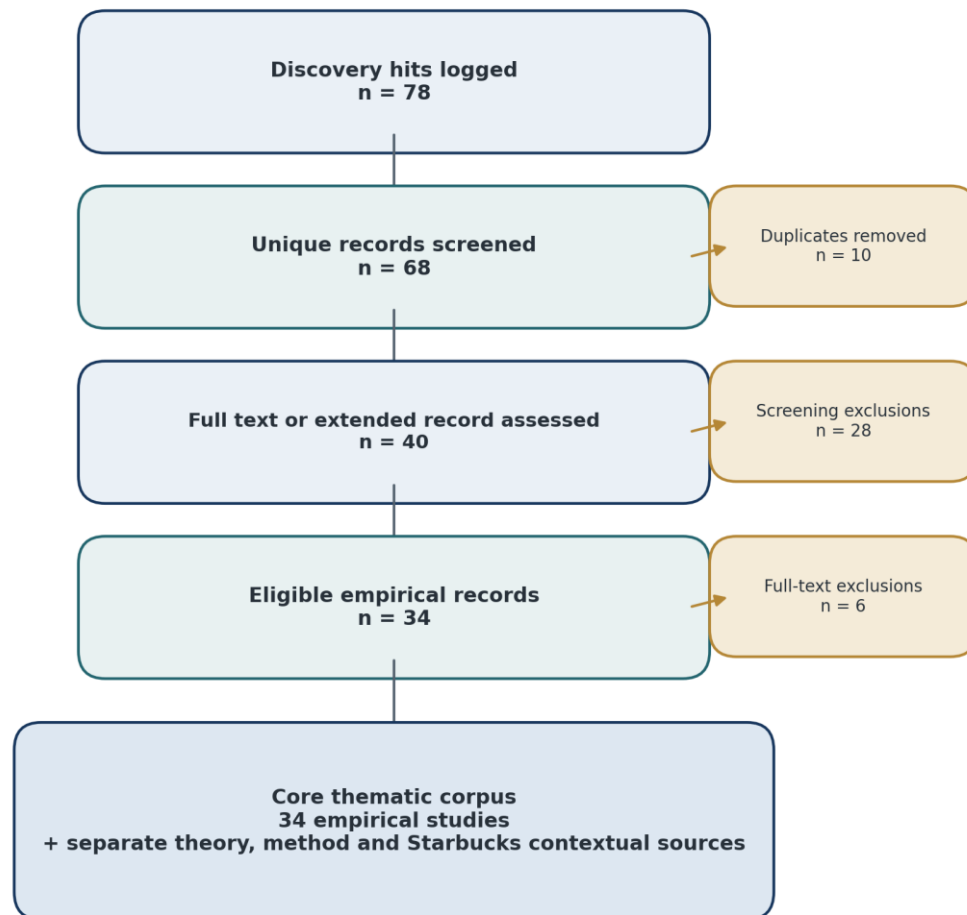
Table 2. Search, inclusion and exclusion protocol

Stage	Applied procedure	Decision rule / recorded output
Discovery	Google Scholar, publisher and DOI records; citation chaining; official Starbucks pages searched separately	78 discovery hits logged
Search concepts	Service quality, satisfaction, SERVQUAL, expectation confirmation, Starbucks, coffee shop, restaurant, Servicescape, app, delivery and recovery	Terms combined iteratively across customer, context and channel
Date	Priority to 2020–2026	Older theory, methods and uniquely relevant empirical work retained
Inclusion	Recoverable record; substantive relevance; transparent setting and method; reputable or indexed outlet	Direct, coffeehouse and defensibly adjacent evidence labelled separately
Exclusion	Unrecoverable citation; unrelated outcome; inadequate transparency; press repetition; no defensible transfer	Reasons stored at title/abstract and full-text stages
Screening	10 duplicate representations removed; 68 unique records screened	28 title/abstract exclusions; 40 assessed in depth
Eligibility	Full text or extended record checked against criteria	6 excluded after assessment
Core corpus	Structured extraction and thematic analysis	34 empirical studies; theory, method and corporate records held separately

Source: Research protocol informed by Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003), Whitemore and Knafl (2005), Snyder (2019), Paul and Criado (2020), Page et al. (2021), Booth et al. (2022), and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023).

78 discovery hits on documented search log. 68 different records left for title and abstract screening after removal of 10 duplicate records of the same. Twenty-eight were dropped at this point, mostly for being conceptual background, focused on an outcome other than the one that was relevant for the sector, and/or not sector relevant. Forty were assessed by full-text or extended record, and six were not found to be metadata and method or substantive relevant. Thirty-four empirical studies were included in the core thematic corpus. This included foundational theory, research-method texts and nine dated Starbucks corporate sources which were placed in their own contextual categories but not included as empirical studies. This distinction ensures that a theoretical article or company announcement is not as seemingly "empirical" as a study of customers.

Figure 2. Evidence identification and screening flow



Exclusion decisions and duplicate links are retained in the evidence ledger.

Source: Created by the Author

3.5 Data extraction and appraisal

Each core study was mapped using a structured extraction record, which included details about author(s), year, geographical context, service context, constructs emphasized, and design and sample (if reported), with findings pertinent to research questions drawn and limitations and contribution to emerging theme noted in each core study. The use of a second field to document whether the evidence was Starbucks-specific, coffeehouse-specific or from an adjoining service was investigated. Records from corporations were

retrieved based on date, initiative, stated purpose and interest. This meant the difference between an Organisation's own numbers and an independent assessment.

Claims rejected during drafting were also captured in the audit trail as well. When a source has not been cited, it has once again been verified as to its bibliographic identity and relevance because the source has surfaced only in the draft chapter that was supplied. Where only an association could be inferred from an abstract, the synthesis avoided replacing it with causation, and where a corporate announcement was about an anticipated benefit, this was retained. These point-of-claim decisions were as significant as the record selections because even in a "real" citation, factual accuracy ultimately can be obscured by overstating a claim.

The final corpus was then frozen and later corporate developments gave context but did not tacitly change the empirical selection criteria used in the context of full thematic writing.

Appraisal was qualitative not a number for quality. More credibility was attributed to studies where the construct's definition was clearly established, clearly measured, and the sampling and analysis processes were clearly explained and directly related to the findings of the study in relation to the construct of satisfaction. Causal claims were not made with cross sectional self-report designs, although this type of design precludes the ability to make such claims and is prevalent throughout the field. Each Country and each Format were considered separately and results were viewed as context-bound. Conceptual mapping was supported by review articles and claims regarding relations were supported by primary empirical studies. When it comes to the official paperwork, one could only say Starbucks had reported its findings or its addition, but couldn't there be a proof that the customers were proven to be more satisfied independently?

3.6 Thematic analysis

The evidence was analysed using a reflexive thematic approach inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022). Initially, the records were read over and over again and notes were taken in accordance to each and every research question. Second, the following initial codes emerged around the issues of reliability, waiting, employee interaction, confidence,

personalisation, physical space, digital convenience, fulfilment, value, expectations, recovery and contextual variation. Thirdly, the related codes were grouped and compared with two types of deductive frame: SERVQUAL and ECT. Fourth, contradictory and null findings are considered with the themes. Fifth, there was no list of contributions, just summarised documents; themes were set up around a central organising idea. Last (but not least) the themes were written as an analytical account, associated with the theory, managerial implications.

The five themes that emerged were: multidimensional quality with unequal effects; expectation confirmation and the premium consistency gap (PCG); human interaction and the physical Servicescape; digital convenience, fulfilment friction (FC); and operational capacity, recovery and cross-store consistency. The themes were not considered as frequencies. If a study did not report the finding, but the finding was helpful in understanding the relationship or the boundaries of the relationship, it was considered an analytically important finding. Negative and non-significant and conditional results are highlighted to minimize confirmation bias.

3.7 Trustworthiness, ethics and researcher reflexivity

Triangulation of data was facilitated using Starbucks-specific, more generic hospitality, and digital-service and official organisation evidence to increase credibility. Support of dependability via saved search and extraction log, explicit criteria and a repro-decibel citation ledger. Addressed conformability by linking claims to recoverable sources, and by separating evidence from inference. Detailed identification of context instead of unsupported global generalisation allowed for support of transferability. These safeguards are based on the trustworthiness principles of Lincoln and Guba (1985) but modified for documentary research.

Reflexivity was required too. Consider using SERVQUAL as a beginning point might lead the researcher to exclude newer digital/operational issues into current categories. In a similar way, ECT might have prompted each dissatisfaction report to be interpreted as a disconfirmation. The analysis thus identified emergent codes, and kept contextual explanations where the theories were incomplete. Just because a source was more recent was not necessarily the best because corporate optimism was treated cautiously.

It was the study of publicly available or published content, which didn't involve identifiable participant data. This meant that very little direct risk was put to individuals, accordingly. But ethical responsibilities were not to be abandoned: correct attribution, faithful representation (no twisting your arguments), respect for copyright, no making up of evidence, and disclosure of interests of the source. No quotation unconfirmed or invented customers' response was utilized.

3.8 Methodological limitations

The design is not able to measure an overall effect size or show causation. Suffers from the sampling, construct, and reporting limitations in the underlying texts. Some locally published research may not be well represented in English-language searching and access to full text and indexing can influence selections. The 2020-2026 priority was designed to generate currency, but could have excluded relevant sector information; some of this was redressed in the process by retaining seminal and uniquely relevant studies. Evidence is largely limited to specific markets in Asia and Europe and branded ventures like Starbucks Reserve stores. Finally, corporate information is timely but interested, and operational changes happen so fast that certain initiatives do not have independent post-implementation reviews being performed.

The above constraints are used to define the strength of the conclusion. From the analysis, one can see the convergent mechanisms and a potential ranking of managerial priorities (rather than a universal ranking of cause for Starbucks's service dimensions and/or a verified hierarchy of effectiveness in each).

3.9 Chapter summary

The dissertation employs an interpretivist, deductive and qualitative secondary-data design. A documented structured review led to a core corpus of 34 empirical studies, theory, method and clearly labelled Starbucks records. Five themes were elicited by a structured extraction and reflexive thematic analysis with due protection in place for source quality, context, contradiction and researcher influence.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the empirical data (a 34-study corpus which underwent thematic analysis) and of the separately classified Starbucks records. The analysis focuses on patterns of evidence, its strength and limitations, not the calculation of an effect size. Five themes emerged that will be referred to as follows: multidimensional quality and unequal effects, expectation confirmation and the premium consistency gap, human interaction and the physical Servicescape, digital convenience and fulfilment friction, and operational capacity, recovery and cross-store consistency. Themes are preceded by a summarisation of the evidence clusters as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics and analytical contribution of the evidence base

Evidence cluster	Illustrative sources	Contribution to analysis	Main interpretive limit
Starbucks-specific	Wu (2017); Yu and Fang (2009); Chang (2020); Ge et al. (2021); Lee, Jung and Moon (2022); Albuquerque and Ferreira (2022)	Experiential quality, value, satisfaction, brand outcomes and co-creation within the named brand	Mostly single-market, cross-sectional surveys; several outcomes are not satisfaction
Coffeehouse and café	Dhisasmito and Kumar (2020); Tran, Dang and Tournois (2020); Song, Wang and Han (2019); Zhang, Kim and Goodsir (2019); Tao and Kim (2022); Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025)	Servicescape, interaction, product/service experience, online reviews and contextual variation	Different business types and cultural settings limit direct Starbucks transfer
Restaurant and fast-food	Namkung and Jang (2007); Ha and Jang (2010); Ryu and Han (2010); Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012); Qin and Prybutok (2009); Slack et al. (2021); Zhong and Moon (2020)	Replicates links among service, product, environment, value and satisfaction	Service process, dwell time and product mix differ from coffeehouses
Servicescape and interaction	Wall and Berry (2007); Kim and Moon (2009); Ryu and Jang (2008)	Shows how employee behaviour, environment and restaurant type combine	Older studies and controlled models may not represent omnichannel journeys

Evidence cluster	Illustrative sources	Contribution to analysis	Main interpretive limit
Digital and mobile retail	Collier and Bienstock (2006); Blut (2016); Rita, Oliveira and Farisa (2019); McLean, Al-Nabhani and Wilson (2018); Vakulenko et al. (2019)	Identifies interface, fulfilment, availability, control and last-mile mechanisms	Adjacent retail contexts; limited direct evidence on Starbucks handoff
Online food delivery	Suhartanto et al. (2019); Annaraud and Berezina (2020); Uzir et al. (2020; 2021); Gavilan et al. (2021); Prasetyo et al. (2021)	Connects e-service, food quality, customer service, fulfilment, value and satisfaction	Pandemic and delivery-partner conditions may affect transfer

4.2 Theme 1: Multidimensional quality, unequal effects

The one thing that comes out more consistently is that, customers judge a set of service attributes, not one single blob of quality. In restaurant and coffee-shop studies, the triad of employee service, outcome quality and physical environment are key, with differing importance as the model or context varies (Ryu and Han, 2010; Ryu, Lee, and Kim, 2012; Zhong and Moon, 2020). The corpus thus validates SERVQUAL as a classification of relevant attributes but presents challenges to the assumption of the stability and similarity of influence of its five dimensions.

Reliability was a key organising characteristic. Coffee serves certainly includes getting the coffee right the first time, reliable orders, picking up & opening, and quality service over the duration of the stay. The Starbucks Reserve study by Ge et al. (2021) relates perceived service quality to perceived value and satisfaction, where reliability attributes are included in the service quality assessment, as well as assurance and empathy. Broader evidence in fast food also suggests a relationship between the quality dimensions, satisfaction and behavioural intentions, although individual effects can become weaker when, in addition to the impact of food quality, value and other food dimensions are also assessed (Slack et al., 2021). Reliability seems to be particularly critical as it follows on the 'easiness' to point to failures, e.g., a drink that isn't promised on time, an order that the system didn't handle, or a delay in the time for which a system was promised.

Being responsive was linked to the time and acknowledgements. The theme wasn't about simply speed. Customers need believable information, they need to be able to see progress and have access to help if and when the service deviates from the plan. Food delivery studies, however, find that control, fulfilment and customer service are also satisfaction antecedents, meaning that uncertainty is as bad as (or worse than) elapsed time (Annaraud and Berezina, 2020; Prasetyo et al., 2021). This means that for Starbucks, an accurate 'collection estimate' and proactive acknowledgement may help to convey responsiveness, despite demand levels.

In studies related to experiential quality, trust, value and co-creation, assurance and empathy were most apparent. In the context of Starbucks, Wu (2017) relates experiential quality to the value of the service and their trust in it, which is connected to satisfaction and loyalty, whereas Albuquerque and Ferreira (2022) connect service quality to loyalty and customer co-creation behaviour. These findings reveal that employee competence and relational treatment is not limited to customers' courtesy, but it also lessens customer uncertainties and facilitates the customer's customising or problem solving. But, the research is based on self-reports, and it is not possible to conclude that satisfaction is promoted as a result of each interaction with the person. Empathy is understood to mean "attention" and not the loudest interaction, with some customers wanting efficient and low-touch transactions.

Tangibles had a presence but were conditional (always present but rarely important). Cleanliness, layout, equipment, and appearance are some of the elements that provide evidence of quality but the physical atmosphere isn't necessarily a primary component of every type of coffee shop. However, Dhisasmito and Kumar (2020) observed that the role of the store atmosphere in developing loyalty in Jakarta is not as strong as it should be, while Tran, Dang and Tournois (2020) discovered servicescape and social interaction as factors contributing to the coffee-store experience in Vietnam. This divergence indicates, therefore, that tangibles operate on a base of customer purpose, value and experience NOT a consistent first order impact.

Thus, it is not important to rank the dimensions of SERVQUAL as these are the theme's dimensions. The factors reliability and responsiveness apply to a wide range of situations,

helping to uphold the basic promise; assurance, empathy and tangibles are more or less visible based on risk, problem occurrence, the purpose of the visit and channel. The level of product quality, as well as the price, are also contextual. The research conducted by Starbucks on coffee quality indicates that taste, along with price fairness, have an impact on brand related evaluations, which reveals that a higher level of service cannot be analysed in isolation from the core offering (Lee, Jung and Moon, 2022).

4.3 Theme 2: Expectation confirmation and the premium consistency gap

Here are reasons related to service quality and satisfaction as offered in the second theme. The definition of customers across the evidence is those who experience the product or service. The mechanism of ECT is not explicitly measured in the Starbucks studies, but is evident in the relationship between perceived performance, value, and satisfaction. When the performance matches the finding of reliability and experiential quality, or the quality of coffee, this condition can be considered as confirmed performances, which can be explained with satisfaction. If there is a condition such as delay, value concern or inconsistency, this becomes the condition of negative disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980; Ge et al., 2021).

Starbucks brand can raise the given bar. Expectations of competence and consistency are built on premium price, global familiarity, customise and easier-to-use digital convenience. The analysis resulted in a “premium consistency gap”—how strong a brand can be can also accentuate the cost of its delivery when it appears ordinary, uncertain or internally inconsistent. Inference from ECT and evidence, but not directly estimated variable. This indirectly comes in light of the significance of price fairness, taste, reliability and experiential quality of Starbucks-specific models (Wu, 2017; Lee, Jung and Moon, 2022).

Consistency is TIMESTAMP-based and across stores. Cumulative satisfaction signifies that the set of customer experiences has an impact on how they view a given experience. When there is one failure, it can be tolerated if it is accepted and corrected – repeated uncertainty may lead to a lowered expectations of the brand by the customer. This trend can be seen as an explanation for the relevance of operational projects focused on the

repetitive acts that are not readily recognisable as marketing activity. This Siren Craft communication focuses on "Role clear; Sequencing & demand anticipation," reflecting an organisational effort to minimize variation in the production system (Starbucks, 2024). The source shows some intention, but not impact on the customer; consistent with the analytical theme, the source's problem definition is similar.

Evidence also indicates that expectations are media specific. Delivery customers might be promised conditions and time certainty; app customers a seamless barrier-free experience to get to brick and mortar; and cafe users, hospitality and a suitable environment. Thus satisfaction cannot be guaranteed with one overarching goal. A store may be great for throughput but fall short of what customers really wanted in a "third place" or conversely great at interacting with customers but fail to satisfy the time expectation of the mobile use case. Expectation standard to be understood at journey and occasion level.

4.4 Theme 3: Human interaction and physical servicescape

Third theme is about staff and setting. Research on restaurants shows that while the employee's behavior and surroundings make a difference, employees and the restaurant environment work together to influence service quality perceptions, instead of operating in isolation (Kim & Moon, 2009; Wall et al., 2007). However, this is complemented by the 'coffee-store research' which reveals that other coffee drinkers, as well as the nature of the practices, shape the experience (Tran, Dang and Tournois, 2020). We thus position the Starbucks service encounter as co-produced in a socially and materially embedded world.

Human interaction is part of the "acknowledgement, competence, emotional tone, recovery". These qualities align with responsiveness, authenticity and empathy, with evidence indicating impact to be dependent on authenticity and situational fit. A welcome message won't improve an unattended delay, and an effective transfer of a call doesn't necessarily do much to impress the customer if they're calling for assistance. The job of the employee becomes integrative, in other words, to convey the operational status to the customer so that he or she can understand and trust.

This role is facilitated or hampered by the servicescape. The arrangement affects visibility of waiting customers, interaction between waiting queues in the mobile sector and the cafe area, and the orderly handoff. If people are being well cared for, there is evidence of cleanliness and maintenance. Seating, sound and density influence the ability for the store to serve as a place to stay. The corpus is linked to Pizam and Tasci's (2019) wider *experienscape* concept, as the physical, sensory and social cues are integrated and co-functional. Usefulness does not depend upon a single design standard, however, but on the size of the store, market, visit purpose and demand pattern.

This recent Starbucks storyline, called back to Starbucks, draws the spotlight once again back to the Starbucks coffeehouse hospitality/cafe experience (Starbucks, n.d.). Read within the context of the empirical evidence, the strategic direction has some sense of it, but there is a tension there. For a stay-awhile proposition, hospitable servicescape is required and for the increasing mobile demand, predictable flow and collection are required. If both use the same overly-booked destination, enhancements for one trip could detract from another. Thus, physico-digital zoning and employee visibility are found to be issues of service quality, rather than design vignette.

4.5 Theme 4: Digital convenience and fulfilment friction

The 4th theme is fulfilment cannot be separated from digital quality. In each of the frequent studies, efficiency, availability, privacy and fulfilment are cited as a factor in online quality (E-service research) (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Malhotra 2005; Blut 2016). Mobile-app research creates value by means of utility, ease and customisation (McLean, Al-Nabhani and Wilson, 2018). While these attributes can lessen ordering effort and enable control, the satisfaction benefit hinges on the ability of the physical system to actually deliver on the digital promise.

This relationship is reinforced by evidence from online retail and delivery of food and beverages. Last-mile performance is in the middle of online satisfaction and food quality and customer service still play a role in addition to platform quality, based on Vakulenko et al. (2019) and Suhartanto et al. (2019). In Starbucks' case, the 'last metres' are where our company is app confirmation to bar production, staging to customer handoff. A stable interface can increase the anticipated convenience and create a demand during peak

periods. Estimated readiness is self-deception or pickup area is unclear or undefined, a positive digital encounter is negative operational disconfirmation.

This pattern uncovers a key asymmetry. Digital convenience is often judged before the store ever gets a look at customer, but when it fails, the customer notices. The customer sees and experiences one journey, but organisation responsibilities could be split between app team, forecasting team, staffing, production and store team. So satisfaction at interfaces is at risk. Since delivery, it means another barrier and ends up of direct control on time and product situation pertaining to Starbucks.

The study does not suggest that technology dehumanises the human service. Well-designed tools can help to conserve workers' attention through positive applications of sequence, information and recovery. Starbucks states that the in-store knowledge tool is called 'Starbucks Green Dot Assist' while 'Smart Queue' is a solution for ordering for the cafes, drive through, mobile or delivery (Starbucks, 2025; Starbucks, 2026b). Availability and fulfilment supports these claims, but evidence of independent outcome evaluation was not identified during the period reviewed. The correct epilogue is that technology is a service-quality enabler which value will have to be verified at the whole journey level.

4.6 Theme 5: Operational capacity, recovery and cross-store consistency

The last theme descends from appearances to conditions. When the demand is higher than the effective capacity or when an order is too complex or there are different order priorities in the channels, he/she tends to become unreliable and irresponsible. This places a trade-off for employees between speed, accuracy and the relationship. In 2024, the company disclosed that its customer experience process was being challenged, and these subsequent announcements identified ongoing investments in staffing and streamlining processes and improving service (Starbucks Corporation, 2024; Starbucks Corporation, 2025c). These records are self-reported yet they support the importance of the question to the management of Starbucks.

Variability and perceived fairness are the two factors by which capacity impacts satisfaction. Customers do not see a staffing model, they see an uncertain queue, an

unacknowledged wait or an order showing up out-of-sequence. The action with a mixed (mobile) channel order queue may look unfair because mobile orders are not visible in queue. Responsiveness thus means both giving the explanation of the system and real recovery it's not just more labour and more speed.

From the information found it was concluded that service recovery was a neglected area within the literature in many cases of the Starbucks specific empirical studies. Compared to coffeehouse studies, which tend to model normal performance, E-S-QUAL explicitly differs the concept of recovery responsiveness from contact and compensation and routine quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra, 2005). This is a big issue as the lessons from failure are related to the pace with which the failure is identified and reviewed and learnt from. By letting employees correct an error, assurance and empathy is restored, and continual escalation can increase negative disconfirmation.

However, the cross-store consistency needs to be balanced with the local fit. The reliability of standard recipes, routines, and digital systems follows; customers utilise stores differently in different countries and formats. The findings of Tao and Kim (2022), revealed that there are differences in online review insights depending on the type of coffee business, while studies focusing on Starbucks have reported differing results in different national contexts (Starbucks et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2021). It is therefore necessary to have a universal promise of a minimum, but not an identical service script. The data facilitate the standardization of outcome and recovery principles and the local adaption of interaction and servicescape.

In each theme there are mediating constructs and thus direct attribution is complicated. In various instances perceived value, trust, image and emotion more partially determine the links with quality and subsequent outcomes (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012; Wu, 2017). It can be argued that the cause and effect between the service and satisfaction could stem from one of the following reasons; the improvement in the service made the price appear reasonable, it decreased the risk perceived by the customer or it altered the emotional perspective of the customer, but not as a result of them actively marking their satisfaction in a quality dimension. On the other hand, brand image can convey positive scores even in circumstances when the operating results are

mixed. Hence, satisfaction is added as a result of interpreted performance, and not in the form of an automatic output of operation.

Starbucks-specific studies offer more direct relevance and scope but limited geography and causality, while the adjacent studies offer more replication of services but need to be adapted. Corporate records are timely, but also have a vested source. The identified mechanisms, together, support the identified mechanisms without, yet, resolving the magnitude and store-level distribution.

4.7 Chapter summary

Analysis reveals that while perceived service quality and satisfaction are consistently positively associated, there does not appear to be a universal causal relationship, nor do all the service dimensions have a constant order. Reliability and responsiveness are very important to the core promise; assurance, empathy and tangibles come into play depending on circumstances and the purpose. Satisfaction occurs when the physical and digital experience are 'joined up' and expectations are met. Delivering that promise on a consistent basis depends on operational capacity and employee enablement and recovery. The themes are then read in the following chapter and relations with theory and contradictory evidence and Starbucks' strategic context are interpreted.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the five themes have been interpreted in relation to the research questions and the conceptual framework. The main argument is that Starbucks' service quality will (dis)confirm and influence the satisfaction of the customers in a chain of interrelated services. Well supported as an association, the strength and expression of the relationship depends on the attribute, channel, and occasion and evidence base. Therefore, the discussion neither uses a ranking and does not assumes a uniform ranking nor assumes qualified transfer from neighboring sectors to Starbucks conclusions.

5.2 How service quality affects satisfaction in Starbucks

The primary question of the research is to what extent the quality of customer service can influence the satisfaction in the Starbucks system? The synthesis reveals that customers' judgement is based on the overall performance of both employees and processes, physical environment and digital interfaces. These perceptions relate to satisfaction as it proves or disproves the expectation ones has built as a result of previous experience, price or brand communications, and situations. This explanation is a merging of the attribute logic of SERVQUAL and the comparison logic of ECT (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988; Oliver, 1980).

This conclusion is more specific than the statement "Better service leads to higher satisfaction". Many of the studies included in most indices rely on self-report, which is a cross-sectional association. They can demonstrate that customers who express higher quality express higher satisfaction, value or favourable intention, but they cannot rule out reverse evaluation, common method bias, and omitted factors. The relationship is observed in Starbucks-specific evidence from Shanghai, Taiwan and elsewhere that shows a positive relationship, but is not a controlled global test (Wu, 2017; Ge et al., 2021; Albuquerque and Ferreira, 2022). Causality is therefore still in question, and the most defensible answer to satisfaction is that service quality is an important antecedent and interpretive basis of satisfaction.

The managerial relevance is added by the system perspective. They do not typically break down experience into 'departments' for customers. This includes an evaluation of the App Promise, production sequence, employee behaviour, and store layout and recovery response. The results are interpreted as such in line with Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) customer-journey account and by De Keyser et al.'s (2020) touchpoint framework. Starbucks should follow suit and consider quality at touchpoints, as well as at hand-offs, between order and production and between production and recovery, from failure.

5.3 Interpreting the SERVQUAL dimensions

The first of the supporting questions being asked relates to the large scales that exist in the literature. Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles are still important but analysis indicates that they are not exhaustive and independent. Reliability is characterised by product order accuracy as well as process predictability. Responsiveness encompasses speed, answer and support-seeking opportunities. Assurance incorporates employee knowledge and the credibility of information. Empathy attention in an appropriate way, in the context. Tangibles range from cleanliness and equipment to spatial organisation, and visible evidence of control.

Reliability seems like a basic component – it secures the exchange customer assumes they bought. This aligns with the Starbucks Reservation evidence presented by Ge et al. (2021) and with the service quality tradition. But reliability also accrues over time; when you are consistent over the course of multiple visits that builds trust; if you're sometimes great and sometimes poor, it will be more difficult to divide risks on the next visit. On a firm level, the importance of cumulative evaluations is evident from Anderson and Sullivan's (1993) overall model but the actual Starbucks mechanism is not. For a prestige brand the brand promise is the promise of repeatability and a consistent satisfactory performance is more significant than the occasional exceptional performance.

Responsiveness is a theoretical characteristic but operationally linked to reliability. The integrity of the commitment to a time determines whether an extended or ambiguous wait turns into dissatisfaction and whether the failure is the result of a lack of integrity in the commitment to a time. The result confirms SERVQUAL and at the same time reveals the process limitation of SERVQUAL. An item on the scale such as promptness may not show

that it was due to forecasting, app batching, due to the design of the store, or workload. The hierarchical approach that Brady and Cronin (2001) use here can be useful since interaction, outcome, and environment can be analysed as layers instead of being mere characteristics of employees.

Like conditional effects for assurance and empathy. Their impact is significant when customers are seeking guidance, encountering a mistake, or if they are unsure. They might not be as obvious when they get picked up for a regular low-contact pickup. This helps balance the accuracy of relational study of Starbucks with convenience based digital research. Experiential quality, trust and participation are pointed out by Wu (2017) and Albuquerque and Ferreira (2022); and efficiency, fulfilment and security by e-service models (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra, 2005; Blut, 2016). Both the accounts have not ruled each other out: they depict different moments in a course.

The same is true for tangibles. The theory of Bitner (1992) anticipates that surroundings will impact approaches, interaction and assessment, and a number of studies in the hospitality sector help support this view. The coffee-shop evidence, however, does not make for an ambience as an always powerful satisfaction driver. Moderation by purpose, context and model specification is suggested by the contrast between Dhisasmith and Kumar (2020) and Tran, Dang and Tournois (2020). A mobile pickup customer will be exposed to seating, sound and social density for a shorter period of time as compared to a customer who plans to stay. The pertinent question is not 'does the atmosphere matter?' but 'for whom and for which occasion?'.

SERVQUAL therefore needs to be expanded in two controlled ways. Coffeeshop quality and perceived value are contextual conditions because satisfaction in the coffeeshop does not completely dissociate from taste, customisation and price fairness (Namkung and Jang, 2007; Lee, Chung and Moon, 2022). Digital quality is a channel-specific expression of efficiency, reliability, assurance and recovery, plus there's privacy, and interface issues. They can be used as extensions without sacrificing conceptual clarity, and capture well the modern service journey.

5.4 ECT and the premium consistency gap

The second supporting question is what relationship between service quality and satisfaction is in the coffeehouse business. The mechanism is available through ECT – comparing performance to a standard, and encountering confirmation or disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980). Satisfaction is, therefore, not just the sum of the scores of the attributes but also a result of the relation and comparison. Product, price, service and setting affects both the perceived performance and the expectations with which we compare it to the performance.

The key theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the “premium consistency gap” from Chapter 4. Being known and offering premium service level can drive up expectations of accuracy, convenience and hospitality. This leaves them the bottom line asymmetrical hazard - strong brand is probably harder to see when provided, shoddy reliability is easier to see when it is not. The insight takes ECT a step further by identifying the comparison at a brand's omnichannel system. It does not suggest that all of Starbucks customers will have high expectations but it suggests a mechanism for testing in future primary research.

To this mechanism the thought of value matters. Ryu and Han (2010) demonstrate that price can be a moderator to restaurant assessments, and Ge et al. (2021) and Lee, Jung and Moon (2022) demonstrate a link between value judgements and Starbucks. If a customer is willing to pay the premium, the product's credibility and reduced process friction can be expected. The price may increase the negative disconfirmation if the customer thinks that the service attention is not as much, if the timing is not reliable, or if the environment is not as good. On the opposite side, if you can personalize, know-how can explain or a dependable routine can validate the price premium, then it is fair to the trade.

Recovery is also a mix from which ECT has taken its share. Conversely, the recovery encounter raises a different expectation: "will the Organisation recognize the service failure and re-provide the service in an equitable manner? At the same time, however, a new expectation arises from the original service failure namely that of acknowledgment and correction, and whether the Organisation will do so fairly. Addictive communication and the necessary correction can change the end result. According to the separate

recovery scale in E-S-QUAL this distinction is acknowledged (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra, (2005). Empirical work on Starbucks is rather scarce in the area of recovery, so it is a worthwhile research gap and management issue.

5.5 Human connection, servicescape and operational reality

The third and fourth supporting questions refer to evidence and challenges of Starbucks quality. While tattooed, semi-tall espressos have always been a factor in Starbucks, these days it's about fast ordering, drive-throughs and delivery. The discussion does not show a question of hospitality or efficiency, but a need to plan the way both coexist.

The most valuable Human Connection provided by operational conditions. If repeatedly queues are created and become unmanageable or staff members don't have the authority to fix an error, then employee courtesy is likely to diminish. This interpretation extends beyond using employees as a factor in a satisfaction model. Service employees are boundary spanners who convert the internal organisational capacity and policy into the customer's perceptible activities. This co-creative role is supported by the service-dominant logic of Vargo and Lusch (2004) while the research on management or customer-experience management focuses on the organisational capacitines behind the encounter (Homburg, Jozić and Kuehnl, 2017).

The implication is ethically significant and important operating. If the conditions of work make it impossible to be as emotional as people might want to be (e.g. workload, role ambiguities, gaps in information) the words "be more empathetic" are bland. The company is clearly at least partly aware that its standard design practices and its sending of employees to gestures influence the experience based on Starbucks Siren Craft and its staffing communications (Starbucks, 2024; Starbucks Corporation, 2025c). As these are corporate statements, they cannot measure for instance increased satisfaction but can point to the levers on which the organisation is trying to move. Both customer and employee outcomes should be tested across an independent evaluation.

The servicescape also has operational functions. It conveys quality and sustains social function and Organises movement. Having dedicated hand-off locations, where mobile collection meets cafe ordering, can help to encourage responsiveness, as the customer

is less likely to be confused during service, while seating and acoustics can all help to encourage the customer to wait in the shop. The upshot of these responses, within the broader experiencescape perspective, is rightfully considered to be sensory, social and contextual (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Copy that's consistent is helpful, but consistent designs across media as well, would overlook the fact that demand and customer purpose vary between formats.

The reason for the challenge of cross-store consistency is explained. Starbucks has various formats and markets under one recognisable promise. Uniformity can help assurance and decrease training complexity, and neighborhood adaptation can improve empathy and fit. The recommended ratio should be "consistent principles, adaptable expression": accuracy and credible information about time, respectful use and accessible recovery should not be allowed to be negotiated, while the manner of interaction, the spatial focus and the service routine of the regional market may well be subject to change within the limits of evidence.

5.6 Digital convenience and the fulfilment paradox

As seen in the digital findings, there is a fulfilment paradox. The purchasing convenience interface can be improved and enhanced, thereby further arousing the demand for residents, which will reveal the problem of various production and handoffs. The mismatch between anticipating increased capacity and the actual increased performance will increase expectations in a digital improvement more quickly than the actual performance in the physical system can improve. This can then lead to a decrease in satisfaction even though there's nothing wrong with the working of the application. The combination of e-service, mobile-experience and fulfilment research (Rita, Oliveira and Farisa 2019; McLean, Al-Nabhani and Wilson 2018; Vakulenko et al. 2019) leads to this system inference.

The paradox questions touchpoint-based key performance indicators. You can increase app conversion, order volumes, and average production time while also providing your customers with unpredictable collection or crowded pickups. Therefore, there should be a joined up measure of promised versus actual readiness; order accuracy; customer effort; recovery and satisfaction by channel. Just because the mean timings are okay

doesn't mean that it's okay as there could be variations and delays which can lead to disconfirmation. This recommendation will be taken from the developed theory and validated from Starbucks operational data.

Use of technology can offer support or exacerbate the issue. Forecasting and sequencing tools can synchronise the channel needs and employee knowledge tools can enhance assurance and recovery. Huang and Rust (2021) claim that AI should only be deployed strategically and in relation to tasks, and is not an aim in itself. Social and governance aspects of frontline automation are also pointed out by Wirtz et al. (2018). Starbucks' Smart Queue and Green Dot Assist align with the supportive use case, which are mentioned as tools to facilitate sequencing and employee access to information (Starbucks, 2025; Starbucks, 2026b). It's not about deployment, but about whether they cut down on variability while making customers or employees feel less in control.

The evidence also urges us to strive for channel equity, and not equality, with the service. Three different customers use a cafe, a mobile customer and a delivery customer have to handle 3 different interfaces while each one needs accurate information, a guaranteed customer experience and easy recovery. An unassigned priority for one queue may lead to the feeling of unfairness for another related queue. Therefore, omnichannel quality needs to be managed like a series of promises and not like an interchannel battle.

Another implication relates to the customer experience and the employee experience. The evidence presented is customer focused, but the work conditions that engender responsiveness and empathy, are also the conditions to which employees are subject. Sequencing technology could contribute to consistency and attention to the relationship if it offers a value for the absence of ambiguity and offers workable priorities. It may deteriorate the conditions for service if it only intensifies monitoring or shortens the time, without decreasing the complexity. This dissertation did not analyse a data-lay of employees to conclude that it was the mediation variable between the satisfaction of the Starbucks customer. But it does present an argument that can be defended for further research: operational interventions should be assessed based on two performance outcomes: joint customer and employee performance, because they are inextricable at the encounter.

5.7 Contradictions, boundaries and evidential limits

Conflicting results do not represent error, or "noise," that need to be thrown out. They clearly identify the changes in relationship under different contexts. The differences in the outcome for the servicescape and the different importance of employee-service dimensions in the compound restaurant models and the distinction between satisfaction, loyalty and co-creation are all a warning to make blanket statements. For instance, Slack et al. (2021) show that dimension-level relationships may vary depending on customers' perceived value and other qualities. If a bivariate relationship is positive it does not imply an independent direct effect.

A large boundary is Geography. The research focused on the corpus is carried out on an individual level of the Asian/European market, and is somewhat related to the Starbucks business. Expectations and how people respond on the scales may be impacted by cultural norms related to interaction, time, privacy and social use of cafes. There's one more constraint: Store format, Reserve, Drive-through, U-city, coffeeshops and open-air. There should hence be evidence for a global minimum service architecture, not for a global uniformised customer script.

The time limit is no less significant. Corporate changes reported in 2025 and 2026 come after much of the peer-reviewed evidence. While Starbucks had comparable-store sales growth return in fiscal 2025 and continued investing in turnaround efforts, Starbucks' financial and transaction metrics do not reflect satisfaction or attribute changes as they relate to individual initiatives for the same period (Starbucks Corporation, 2025b). Rewards participation, similarly, should be viewed through the lens of participation; the claim of over 35 million active members of Starbucks' programme in the USA is company information, not a service measure.

These are not limitations to subtract what is practical. There are mechanisms around which there is convergence across different research traditions: dependable outcomes matter, time and uncertainty drive responsiveness, human treatment is particularly salient in complexity and/or failure and physical and digital design impact on effort. Of course, the findings can be applied as a framework to decide about and should be tested to local operational and customer data.

5.8 Theoretical and managerial implications

The dissertation shows the two models SERVQUAL and ECT when implemented in a customer journey are complementary in theory. SERVQUAL helps to answer the question of what is measured, ECT is used to create understanding of how satisfaction is created from performance, while the journey perspective addresses the question of where the measurement takes place. The integration can now be deepened with the proposed premium consistency gap and fulfilment paradox: Today, brand and digital convenience can make brands more valuable and more vulnerable to threats as well as opportunities.

This also helps to remove any confusion between service quality and customer experience. Service quality is an evaluation about the attributes of delivery, whereas experience is the mental, emotional, sensational and social reactions over the service journey (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). Satisfaction is the major evaluative outcome in this study. Explanatory relationship models that took all three as synonyms would all be circular. This schema, rather, suggests a chain that has feedback flows: service attributes influence perceived service quality; qualities and context encountered with each service affect the overall experience; expectations affect satisfaction assessment; and effects of satisfaction refer to expectations of a future service visit. The sequence is not necessarily a tested model of causality but is a more coherent conceptual sequence that could give a more coherent basis for measurement.

The framework also states that managerial diagnosis should be applied in the process of expectation formation and operational performance. The value of marketing messages, rewards notifications and estimated collection times are all about service quality, since they form promises that will be measured against actual delivery. Sometimes, cutting back a wrongful promise can enhance confirmation better than trying to shoot for an unrealistic speed goal. This shouldn't excuse lowering standards, it means credible communication with standards raised and capacity built. Where personalisation or promotional demand is involved, such alignment becomes more important, because changes in order complexity usually impact the sales team.

Managerially, the service promise should be the unit of improvement – end to end. Accuracy of production and credible timing are needed for reliability; visibility and

recovery for responsiveness; competent, enabled staff to provide assurance and empathy; and environments that reflect channel and customer purpose for tangibles. It is crucial to measure digital success at handoff, not at checkout. These implications directly contribute to the prioritised recommendations in Chapter 6.

5.9 Chapter summary

The relationship between service quality and satisfaction with Starbucks is mediated by the customers' interpretation of a seamlessly physical and digital user journey (interconnections) compared to what they think they should have experienced. The relationship is solid in general, somewhat conditional in dimension and context. A premium consistency gap, a digital fulfilment paradox and an operational reliance on human connection are the themes of discussion. It has also solidified the rationale for evidence-based adaptation instead of ranking attributes at the global level.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The recommendations answer the fifth sub-question of research that is how Starbucks can improve satisfaction with enhanced services. They are derived directly out of the analysis and are stated as management actions that may be tested, but are not expected to cause anything. The prioritisation process is directed around the customer promise and includes the following: stabilise reliability; make time and 'queue behaviour' visible; allow employees to recover service; incorporate 'digital and physical design'; and learn from variation across stores.

6.2 Establish a channel-specific service promise

Starbucks should go ahead and set a list of non-negotiable end results for journeys that pertain to cafe, mobile, drive-through and delivery. These should include order accuracy, credible time information, respectful acknowledgement and easy recovery. A target value does not necessarily have to be the same elapsed time for all formats, but should be a commitment that is consistent with channel use and the capacity that can be made available. This approach reflects the finding that 'reliability' and 'responsiveness' are general traits and therefore have different experiences with time and circumstance.

Performance should be judged based on the commitment made to the Customer not just based on an internal average. Examples of useful indicators are promise fulfillment vs. actual readiness, accuracy at handoff, customer reported effort, abandoned orders and first contact resolution. Breaking it down by channel, daypart and store format would throw up variation that would not otherwise be evident in a network average. A pilot should start in an appropriate panel of stores, before the targets are affecting incentives, so as to avoid any undesirable effect from speed items which let pilots 'play it safe' and hurry up to meet a target which is reached at a lower level of accuracy.

6.3. Align visibility of demands, capacities & queues

The total load from orders from a cafe, mobile, drive through, and delivery should be taken into account when creating forecasting and staffing plans. Approaching the effective capacity, the digital promise should be adaptable to the predispositions – and stop

accepting orders at an impossible time once the collection estimate is more realistic. The issue that this recommendation is referring to is known as the fulfilment paradox; when the interface sets up an expectation that the physical system cannot adequately achieve.

Customers and employees should also be able to see the queue rules. Status info that does not reveal private info can be displayed on pickup screens and/or app updates. ORDERING, WAITING and HANDOFF should be reduced in physical collection zones. While the Starbucks' Smart Queue is relevant to directionality, it hasn't been evaluated solely based on queueing speeds; it is crucial to measure any such initiative with independent pre- and post-pilot evidence, such as average tail waiting time as well as the average speed (Starbucks, 2026b).

6.4 Enable human service and rapid recovery

It is important that employee training combines technical skills and situation-based communication. Routine short phrases can aid to acknowledge delay, explain options and to check complex instructions: without resorting to a fixed script. More crucially, workers require authority and information to fix frequent issues during initial interactions. A tiered recovery path could define remaking, refunding, offering alternative or escalating (or any combination) with discretion based on the customers circumstance.

Information gathered from recovery should be used as evidence of learning. Retailers should have a finite number of failure types – accuracy, availability, time, app-handoff, delivery condition, and interaction – and hold a review based on recurrence, not just the resolution of every complaint. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra (2005) explains that the E-S-QUAL distinction between routine delivery and recovery provide for this separate attention. Resolution time, repeat contact, recurrence and post-recovery satisfied should be part of the measures. Reporting a process failure must serve as a means of improvement, not an automatic condemnation – psychological safety for employees is critical.

6.5 Design one journey across digital and physical touchpoints

Ownership of handoff quality should be shared between the digital product teams and store operations. Information to review when assessing potential app features shall

impact the service end to end, including demand concentration, production complexity, staging space and employee information and recovery. The feature should not be considered an unqualified customer-experience success if it does more to increase orders than it does to improve collection reliability.

Green Dot Assist can assist assurance, however, if it provides quick, accurate and up-to-date advice to employees, the interface must be tested at high volume and in addition, there must be a clear path if the answer is unknown (Starbucks, 2025). The personalisation is customer facing, transparent and optional. Data utilization, recommendations, and notification frequency should build trust and not necessarily create cognitive burden. The human-centred approach aligns with various forms of research that sees AI as contingent support tools instead of service judgement substitutes (Huang and Rust, 2021).

6.6 Adapt the servicescape by store purpose

Starbucks should categorize stores based on the demands with their dominance and create layout and service routine accordingly. The initial decision is based on whether a store will focus on staying, or picking up, factors such as seating and cleanliness will be present in a stay-oriented store while legible flow and staging will be a concern in a pickup-heavy store. Mobile congestion should not drive the cafe experience away from mixed stores as they should be zoned for this purpose. The goal is to make an appropriate brand promise and servicescape for its local application, based on contextual findings from the coffee-store research contexts (Tran, Dang and Tournois, 2020; Tao and Kim, 2022).

6.7 Develop a learning system with considerate service quality.

There should be a mix of 'Operational' and 'Customer/Employee' indicators as part of a network dashboard. Measures for operational should involve accuracy, readiness variance / recovery recurrence; for customers it involves satisfaction / effort / 确认明度 (journey) and for employees it involves workload. Financial or Rewards engagement can be used to give context but cannot replace satisfaction evidence.

Qualitative feedback is required to be collected along with scores. Intercept questions and coded complaint narratives designed to be short can help to explain changes in metrics, and controlled pilots can be used to compare implementation with appropriate reference stores. The results are to be reviewed at the local and central level; locally the contextual problems should be identified; centrally, repeatable defects of the system should be identified. This makes it a looped process that focuses on the future of learning instead of a compliance league table.

Table 4. Prioritised implementation plan and indicators

Priority	Action and horizon	Evidence-linked rationale	Illustrative indicators
1. Credible service promise	Define channel-specific minimum outcomes; baseline in 0–3 months	Reliability and expectation protect the basic promise	Order accuracy; promised–actual readiness distribution; customer effort
2. Capacity-aware flow	Pilot combined demand forecasting, realistic estimates and queue visibility in 3–9 months	Digital convenience fails when physical fulfilment is uncertain	Tail wait; status accuracy; abandonment; employee workload
3. First-contact recovery	Set bounded employee authority and failure codes in 0–6 months	Recovery tests responsiveness, assurance and empathy after disconfirmation	Resolution time; repeat contact; recurrence; post-recovery satisfaction
4. One digital–store journey	Require end-to-end impact assessment for features in 3–12 months	Functional boundaries are invisible to customers at handoff	Handoff accuracy; app-to-store effort; peak complexity; exception rate
5. Purpose-fitted servicescape	Classify store formats and test zoning in 6–18 months	Tangibles and social density are contingent on visit purpose	Wayfinding effort; congestion; cleanliness; stay/pickup satisfaction
6. Balanced learning system	Integrate customer, operational and employee evidence from month 1 onward	No single average or loyalty measure represents service quality	Satisfaction and confirmation by journey; variability; workload; recovery learning

6.8 Resumption order and administration

Starbucks should measure channel commitments, identify pilot locations, identify definitions, in first three months. From 3 to 9 months, it will assume queue transparency,

recovery authority, and it will deal with store zoning, and joined up. Interventions to increase accuracy, expectation confirmation and employee conditions, without having negative impacts on the channel, can be scaled by store type generally between nine and eighteen months. Digital, operations, partner experience/customer insight should be owned by an accountable cross-functional individual, and local managers should have bounded authority to adapt.

Governance should involve privacy review, accessibility testing and consultation with employees as well as the inhouse publication of pilot criteria. There should be a stop or redesign condition for each initiative. A sequencing tool that decreases the average run time, but significantly hinders the satisfaction, accuracy and/or workload reported, should be reconsidered. This helps to prevent the recommendations becoming "tech targets" that are separate from customer and employee experience.

Unintended consequences should be called in early and managed by the managers, before a network is deployed.

6.9 Chapter summary

The recommendations focus on reliable commitments, observable and capacity scaled queues, liberated recovery, end-to-end design in the digital realm, fitting stores to their purpose, and harmonised learning. The common denominator is alignment – the “promise” that is made to the customers must equate to operational capability and be backed up by employees, technology and environment. The dissertation ends in the last chapter where the limitations and future research are defined.

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to critically discuss the effect of customer service quality on customer satisfaction of Starbucks using secondary evidence. The study finds that satisfaction is an important thing and perceived service quality an important construct in explaining satisfaction, but that its impact is not uniform and is not separable of the context. The customer experiences a network of employee relationships, service dependability and physical surroundings, and digital execution and delight. When the system functions well relative to the expectations a brand and price have created, combined with the satisfaction of previous exposure and a channel's and purpose of visit, satisfaction is created. The first supporting question was related to the primary dimensions of the service quality. These are still good categories, though they can be applied to modern coffee service, as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles are all useful to modern coffee service. Reliability is reflected in correct preparations and reliable executions; responsiveness in speed, confirmation of execution or access to recovery; assurance and empathy is shown in competent and proper human attention; tangibles include cleanliness, tools and spatial organisation. These dimensions span channels, and they are not mutually exclusive by being superseded by digital efficiency, availability, privacy and handoff integrity. In the second question, people were asked if there is a relationship between satisfaction and quality in the coffeehouse. SERVQUAL determines what attributes is being judged and ECT determines how satisfaction occurs through confirmation or disconfirmation of the performance. The relationship is moderated by product quality, perceived value, culture, store type and store visit purpose. The “premium consistency gap” found within the dissertation summarizes the potential Starbucks risk, that as premium becomes more and more certain, it creates a sense of satisfaction, while premium is less expected the more it is not fulfilled. Concerning what specifically has been used as evidence for Starbucks, a greater body of studies conducted in various country contexts point to a relationship between service/experiential quality and satisfaction, value, trust and loyalty/co-creation. However, a majority of them are cross-sections and context specific, and therefore do not provide a world-wide causal ranking. A broader array of hospitality and digital-service studies

enhance the credibility of the mechanisms found, but are not yet located. Of course there is no direct evidence that any of these factors in the Starbucks report has made an impact with the customers' experience only evidence of organisational actions. Consequently, the challenges that will arise are mainly systemic. Perhaps mobile convenience intensifies demands or raises expectations of time over the actual time that is physically possible; perhaps a shared space will lead to a conflict between cafe and pick-up journey or between employees expected to warm up and workload and uncertainty; perhaps standardisation will clash with local use? One phenomenon that is particularly salient and under-explored is service recovery. The most believable answer would be a match between the promise, capacity, information, authority of employees, and servicescape at the journey level. The dissertation suggests service promises channel specific, capacity aware queue management, transparency of progress, empowered first contact recovery, shared ownership of digital-store, and a balanced learning system. It is important to test and measure these actions via accuracy, readiness variation, customer effort, expectation confirmation, recovery and employee outcomes. Don't use participation or financial performance as substitutes for satisfaction rewards. The study brings an integrated framework that convergences SERVQUAL, ECT and customer journey. It also highlights a digital fulfilment paradox where an interface can become more useful but the overall experience can get worse as demand increases beyond the capability. But, combined with the high quality 'consistency gap' it provides testable explanations for Value and Vulnerability of Innovation and Brand Strength. The secondary design, English-language search, and the heterogeneous measures and focus of the Starbucks studies in specific markets limit the conclusions. Yet causal effects could not be estimated and recently launched initiatives have been subject to a restricted independent evaluation. Future studies can benefit from longitudinal, multi-country and mixed-method design, differentiating between the various consumption occasions (cafe, mobile, drive-thrus, delivery), connecting with the operational prowess and customer and employee experience. The quasi-experimental testing of queue, recovery and artificial-intelligence tools would be especially beneficial. Studies should be done on dis-satisfied customers and customers who do not re-purchase the product since they are usually not represented in convenience samples of customers. By objectively exploring the present circumstances

of routine close-ups and relating them to the previous recovery stories, the extent of satisfaction after responsive correction would be elucidated. This would give theory and practical decision making a backbone. There is a challenge for Starbucks ahead of them and it is not about efficiency or human connection. To build a system of service where reliable service providence provides time, encourages confidence and creates room for proper tie up. Customer satisfaction is most likely to be sustained if all channels make a credible promise or set of paired promises, employees can live up to them, or recover from them, and if the organisation learns in a visual way from variation from changing customer and employee expectations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Search Strategy

The dissertation employed a structured search strategy to identify relevant academic and organisational evidence concerning customer service quality and customer satisfaction in Starbucks and related hospitality, coffeehouse, restaurant, digital-service and retail contexts. The literature search was conducted during July and August 2026. Google Scholar, publisher databases and DOI records were consulted, together with targeted searches of business, marketing and hospitality literature. Official Starbucks investor and corporate webpages were searched separately for organisational reports, strategic announcements and operational initiatives. Backward and forward citation chaining was also used to identify additional relevant studies.

A.1 Main Search Terms

The following keywords and combinations were used:

- “service quality
- “customer satisfaction”
- “Starbucks”
- “SERVQUAL”
- “expectation confirmation”
- “expectation-confirmation theory”
- “coffee shop”
- “coffeehouse”
- “restaurant”
- “Servicescape”
- “mobile ordering”
- “e-service quality”
- “food delivery”
- “customer experience”
- “service recovery”

- “digital service quality”
- “customer journey”

Search terms were combined iteratively across customer, service context and channel dimensions. The search strategy therefore considered both traditional face-to-face service and contemporary physical-digital/omnichannel service experiences.

A.2 Search and Screening Summary

Stage	Number of records	Description
Initial discovery	78	Records identified through database, publisher, DOI, citation and official Starbucks searches
Duplicate removal	10	Duplicate representations removed
Records for title/abstract screening	68	Unique records remaining
Title/abstract exclusions	28	Records excluded because of insufficient relevance or inappropriate focus
Records assessed in depth	40	Full-text or extended records assessed
Further exclusions	6	Records failed the eligibility criteria
Core empirical corpus	34	Empirical studies included in thematic analysis

The dissertation records 78 initial discovery hits, 68 unique records after removal of 10 duplicates, 40 records assessed in depth and 34 empirical studies included in the core thematic corpus.

Appendix B: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

B.1 Inclusion Criteria

A source was considered eligible when it met the following criteria:

1. The bibliographic record was independently retrievable.
2. The source addressed customer service quality, customer satisfaction, or a closely related mechanism.
3. The study provided a sufficiently clear research context.
4. The methodology contained sufficient information for the claims and findings to be evaluated.
5. Preference was given to peer-reviewed research from recognised or indexed marketing, service, hospitality, retail or related journals.
6. Publications from 2020–2026 were prioritised.
7. Older publications were retained where they provided foundational theory, methodology, measurement scales or directly relevant Starbucks evidence.
8. Starbucks-specific, coffeehouse-specific and defensibly transferable adjacent-sector evidence were considered, but these categories were kept analytically distinct.
9. Corporate Starbucks sources were included only when discussing Starbucks' own reported strategy, performance or operational initiatives.

These criteria are consistent with the methodology described in the dissertation.

B.2 Exclusion Criteria

Sources were excluded when:

- The citation could not be independently retrieved.
- The outcome was unrelated to customer service quality or customer satisfaction.
- The methodological information was insufficient for meaningful assessment.
- The source was primarily a press report without an appropriate evidential basis.
- The study had no defensible relevance or transferability to the coffeehouse, hospitality, retail or digital-service context.

- The source duplicated another identified record.
- The source focused on an outcome that was outside the research questions without providing a meaningful connection to the study's core constructs.
- The reasons for exclusion were considered during title/abstract screening and full-text or extended-record assessment.

Appendix C: Evidence Screening and Selection Framework

The following framework was used to maintain consistency during the evidence-selection process.

Screening criterion	Question applied to the source	Decision
Relevance	Does the source address service quality, customer satisfaction or a closely related mechanism?	Include / Exclude
Context	Is the service context Starbucks, coffeehouse, hospitality, restaurant, retail or digital service?	Include / Exclude
Accessibility	Can the bibliographic record and relevant evidence be retrieved?	Include / Exclude
Methodological clarity	Is there sufficient methodological information to assess the evidence?	Include / Exclude
Publication quality	Is the source peer-reviewed, indexed, recognised or otherwise credible?	Include / Exclude
Date	Was the source published between 2020 and 2026, or does an older source provide foundational evidence?	Include / Exclude
Transferability	Can the evidence be reasonably related to the Starbucks service context?	Include / Exclude
Duplication	Is the record a duplicate of another source?	Exclude duplicate

The screening process was iterative rather than being based on a single database export. Duplicate records were minimised using DOI, title and author checks.

Appendix D: Data Extraction Framework

Each study included in the core corpus was reviewed using a structured extraction framework. The extraction process recorded information about the source, research context, methodological design, constructs and findings.

Extraction field	Information recorded
Author(s)	Name(s) of study author(s)
Publication year	Year of publication
Geographical context	Country or geographical setting
Service context	Starbucks, coffeehouse, restaurant, retail, digital service, etc.
Study design	Quantitative, qualitative, conceptual, review or other
Sample	Sample size and participant characteristics where reported
Main constructs	Service quality, satisfaction, value, loyalty, trust, experience, etc.
SERVQUAL relevance	Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles
ECT relevance	Expectations, perceived performance, confirmation/disconfirmation and satisfaction
Main findings	Findings relevant to the research questions
Relationship identified	Association, conditional relationship, null finding or other
Starbucks-specific	Whether evidence directly concerns Starbucks
Adjacent evidence	Whether evidence originates from a related sector
Limitations	Main methodological or contextual limitations
Contribution	Contribution to the emerging thematic analysis
Theme assigned	One or more of the five final analytical themes

The dissertation states that the structured extraction record included author, year, geographical context, service context, constructs, design/sample, relevant findings, limitations and contribution to emerging themes.

Appendix E: Thematic Coding Framework

The thematic analysis followed a reflexive thematic approach informed by Braun and Clarke. Initial codes were developed around reliability, waiting, employee interaction, confidence, personalisation, physical space, digital convenience, fulfilment, value, expectations, recovery and contextual variation.

The codes were subsequently compared with SERVQUAL and Expectation-Confirmation Theory and organised into five principal themes.

Initial codes	Analytical category	Final theme
Accuracy, consistency, reliability, responsiveness	Core service delivery	Theme 1: Multidimensional quality, unequal effects
Expectations, performance, confirmation, disconfirmation, premium promise	Expectation-performance comparison	Theme 2: Expectation confirmation and the premium consistency gap
Employee interaction, confidence, empathy, atmosphere, physical environment	Human and physical experience	Theme 3: Human interaction and physical Servicescape
Mobile ordering, app convenience, fulfilment, collection, delivery	Digital and physical integration	Theme 4: Digital convenience and fulfilment friction
Waiting, capacity, queues, recovery, employee empowerment, consistency	Operational delivery and recovery	Theme 5: Operational capacity, recovery and cross-store consistency

The five themes identified in the dissertation were: multidimensional quality with unequal effects; expectation confirmation and the premium consistency gap; human interaction

and physical Servicescape; digital convenience and fulfilment friction; and operational capacity, recovery and cross-store consistency.

Appendix F: SERVQUAL Analytical Framework

SERVQUAL was used as an analytical framework rather than as a newly administered questionnaire. The five dimensions were applied to interpret customer-facing service attributes identified in the secondary evidence.

SERVQUAL dimension	Meaning in the study	Starbucks-related interpretation
Reliability	Accurate and dependable service	Correct order preparation, dependable fulfilment and reliable collection
Responsiveness	Prompt and helpful response	Waiting-time management, rapid assistance and service recovery
Assurance	Competence, confidence and courtesy	Employee knowledge, confidence and respectful interaction
Empathy	Individual attention and concern	Recognition of customer needs and appropriate personal attention
Tangibles	Physical facilities and appearance	Cleanliness, equipment, store layout and physical environment

The dissertation explicitly defines these five SERVQUAL dimensions and applies them to Starbucks-related service delivery.

Appendix G: Expectation-Confirmation Theory Analytical Framework

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) was used to interpret how perceived service performance can translate into customer satisfaction.

ECT element	Application in the dissertation
Customer expectations	Expectations created by brand promise, previous experience, price and purpose of visit
Perceived performance	Customer perception of the actual service received

ECT element	Application in the dissertation
Confirmation	Performance meets or corresponds with expectations
Disconfirmation	Performance falls below or exceeds expectations
Satisfaction	Resulting evaluation of the service experience
Contextual influences	Channel, urgency, store format, culture, previous experience and purpose of visit

ECT complements SERVQUAL by explaining the process through which perceptions of service attributes can contribute to satisfaction.

Appendix H: Evidence Classification

For analytical purposes, the evidence was classified into three broad categories:

H.1 Starbucks-Specific Evidence

Research directly examining Starbucks customers, Starbucks stores, Starbucks service experiences or Starbucks-related outcomes.

H.2 Coffeehouse and Hospitality Evidence

Research examining coffee shops, cafés, restaurants and related hospitality environments where findings may provide contextual support but cannot automatically be treated as Starbucks-specific evidence.

H.3 Digital and Adjacent-Service Evidence

Research examining e-service quality, mobile retail, online food delivery, digital fulfilment and related service contexts. Such evidence was used to illuminate mechanisms relevant to Starbucks' physical-digital customer journey while recognising the limitations of transferring findings between sectors.

The dissertation deliberately separates Starbucks-specific empirical evidence, adjacent hospitality evidence and corporate records rather than treating them as equivalent forms of evidence.

Appendix I: Research Ethics and Data Management Statement

This dissertation used publicly available academic and organisational information and did not collect identifiable personal data from research participants. No customer survey, interview, observation or experiment was conducted.

Ethical considerations therefore focused primarily on accurate attribution, faithful representation of published findings, respect for copyright, avoidance of fabricated evidence and clear differentiation between empirical evidence and organisational claims.

The dissertation states that no identifiable participant data were involved and that ethical responsibilities included correct attribution, faithful representation, respect for copyright and avoidance of fabricated evidence.

Appendix J: Summary of the Research Process

The overall research process can be summarised as follows:

Research question → Literature search → Identification of 78 records → Removal of 10 duplicates → Screening of 68 unique records → Exclusion of 28 records → Detailed assessment of 40 records → Exclusion of 6 records → 34 empirical studies retained → Structured data extraction → Reflexive thematic analysis → Five themes → Discussion and recommendations

This process supports the dissertation's interpretive, deductive and qualitative secondary-data design.