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Understanding customer loyalty in digital services: insights from food delivery in emerging markets

Bora Ly[1*]

*Correspondence:
ly.bora@pucsr.edu.kh

[1] Regional Polytechnic Institute Techo Sen Siem Reap and Pannasastra University of Cambodia, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Abstract

This study examines the factors influencing customer loyalty in Cambodia's food delivery app sector, with a focus on trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience as key drivers of customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. Grounded in the Commitment-Trust Theory and the SERVQUAL model, this study examines how these factors collectively influence consumer behavior in an emerging market. Data were collected via survey questionnaires from 324 Cambodian respondents and analyzed using partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS–SEM). The results reveal significant positive relationships between trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, and customer satisfaction, which mediates the impact of these factors on repurchase intentions. Trustworthiness has emerged as particularly influential due to concerns over data privacy, while service quality and convenience are crucial in shaping user satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Food delivery apps, Trustworthiness, Service quality, Convenience, PLS–SEM

Introduction

The rapid rise of food delivery apps has revolutionized the global food service industry, offering consumers increased accessibility and convenience for ordering meals digitally (Liu et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2023). In Cambodia, where smartphone penetration and digital adoption are increasing, platforms such as Foodpanda, Nham24, GrabFood, and others have introduced app-based food ordering, reshaping the local food delivery landscape. However, while these apps offer diverse culinary options and seamless experiences, the factors driving customer satisfaction and loyalty in this emerging market remain underexplored, particularly given Cambodia's unique socioeconomic and infrastructural context. Service quality, trustworthiness, and convenience are well-documented factors influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty to digital services. The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) assesses service quality through dimensions, such as reliability, responsiveness, and assurance—attributes crucial to food delivery apps. Previous studies have confirmed that service quality, such as accurate order fulfillment, enhances satisfaction (Su et al., 2022). However, the applicability of SERVQUAL in emerging

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markets remains underexplored. Cambodian consumers, new to digital platforms, may prioritize these dimensions differently due to local factors, presenting a theoretical gap in SERVQUAL's universal relevance to digital services in developing contexts. Trustworthiness, rooted in Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), is crucial for fostering loyalty in digital transactions, particularly when physical interactions are absent. In Cambodia's emerging market, trust issues such as payment security and data privacy are critical amid the development of consumer protections. While trust is a well-established determinant of satisfaction (Ginting et al., 2023), its role in markets with minimal regulatory safeguards remains under-examined, highlighting a gap in applying Commitment-Trust Theory to emerging digital economies. Convenience—encompassing ease of access, time savings, and simplified ordering—is a core driver of satisfaction and repurchase intention (Ng et al., 2023). For Cambodian users new to app-based ordering, convenience may be key to adoption, yet research often overlooks how logistical and infrastructural challenges in emerging markets like Cambodia shape its impact. This study addresses these gaps by examining the impact of trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience on customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions in Cambodia's food delivery app market. Existing research on digital servitization focuses on developed economies, leaving emerging markets underexamined. This study examines Cambodian consumers' perceptions of trust, service quality, and convenience to identify the factors that drive loyalty in the food delivery sector. The findings offer practical insights for platforms to enhance trust, service quality, and convenience while contributing to the literature on digital servitization and consumer behavior in emerging markets by addressing theoretical gaps in SERVQUAL and Commitment-Trust Theory applications.

Theoretical foundations

Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) provide robust frameworks for understanding consumer behavior on digital platforms, such as food delivery apps, with a focus on trust, service quality, and convenience as key drivers of satisfaction and loyalty. Commitment-Trust Theory emphasizes trust as foundational to long-term consumer relationships, particularly relevant in Cambodia's emerging market, where limited regulatory oversight heightens concerns over payment security, food safety, and data privacy (Ghali-Zinoubi, 2023). In digital contexts that lack physical interaction, trust mitigates perceived risks, thereby fostering repeated engagement (Foroughi et al., 2024). This theory is particularly relevant to Cambodia due to the need to build consumer confidence in an emerging digital economy, which requires the development of trust mechanisms. Similarly, SERVQUAL highlights service quality dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, and assurance—as critical to meeting expectations and boosting loyalty (Jusufbašić & Stević, 2023). In Cambodia, infrastructural challenges such as inconsistent delivery logistics and sociocultural preferences may reshape these dimensions; therefore, SERVQUAL's relevance lies in assessing its adaptability to these unique conditions (Bonfanti et al., 2023). While its effectiveness is well-established in developed markets, its application in emerging economies remains underexplored, making Cambodia a critical case for investigation.

Furthermore, convenience—encompassing ease of access, time savings, and seamless transactions—drives satisfaction and repurchase intention in food delivery services (Zygiaris et al., 2022). In Cambodia's rapidly urbanizing context, smartphone adoption is driving demand for convenience-focused on-demand services. However, logistical challenges may affect their impact differently than in developed markets (Ng et al., 2023). Despite its recognized role, the influence of convenience in emerging economies remains understudied, underscoring the need for context-specific research. Customer satisfaction integrates these factors, mediating their effects on repurchase intentions and fostering loyalty and advocacy (Bao & Wang, 2021; Das & Ramalingam, 2023). This study examines the relationship between satisfaction, trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience, and their impact on loyalty in Cambodia's food delivery market, providing insights for similar emerging contexts. Research gaps still exist when applying these theories to emerging markets. The lack of studies focused on trust-building in Southeast Asia's digital services, along with Cambodia's unique regulatory and cultural characteristics, underscores the importance of Commitment-Trust Theory in this context. In addition, the untested adaptability of SERVQUAL to Cambodia's socioeconomic and infrastructural conditions justifies its use to identify specific service quality demands (Daryazadeh et al., 2022). Finally, the role of convenience in driving continued app usage in emerging markets remains underexamined (Zygiaris et al., 2022). By addressing these gaps, this study enhances understanding of customer loyalty in digital servitization, offering actionable insights for platforms in Southeast Asia.

Hypothesis development

Trust, service quality, and convenience are key factors in driving customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions in food delivery apps. However, their interplay in an emerging market like Cambodia demands rigorous critical analysis. In Cambodia, where smartphone penetration is accelerating digital adoption, but weak regulatory oversight and inconsistent infrastructure persist, trust becomes a linchpin for mitigating risks, such as payment fraud, data breaches, and food safety concerns (Ghali-Zinoubi, 2023; Ginting et al., 2023). Research on platforms such as Shopee Food and GrabFood demonstrates that trust has a significant impact on satisfaction and repurchase intention (Avisca & Djakasaputra, 2024; Lathofia & Prasetio, 2023). In contrast, the McDonald's app shows that trust in secure, private transactions fosters loyalty (Susanto & Pandjaitan, 2024). However, this study challenges the generalizability of such findings, arguing that Cambodia's nascent digital economy, with limited consumer protection laws and low digital trust, elevates the stakes of trust far beyond those in developed markets, necessitating a deeper exploration of its role (Chowdhury, 2023; Lee & Ha, 2023). Service quality, rooted in SERVQUAL's dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Parasuraman et al., 1988), consistently drives satisfaction across various industries, including fuel stations, restaurants, and digital platforms (Andriyani, 2024; Dalimunthe & Suryani, 2024; Rahmat Kurnia et al., 2024). However, in Cambodia, where logistical challenges—such as inconsistent delivery times due to poor road networks—and socio-cultural preferences for fresh, local cuisine reshape expectations, SERVQUAL's universal applicability falters, pushing this research to critically test its limits in an emerging context

(Bonfanti et al., 2023; Daryazadeh et al., 2022; Dhaniswara et al., 2023). Convenience, encompassing ease of use, time savings, and seamless transactions, enhances satisfaction and retention, a trend amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic (Natasha et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2022; Riaz et al., 2022; Song et al., 2017). In Cambodia's rapidly urbanizing society, where smartphone reliance meets infrastructural gaps such as unreliable last-mile delivery, the role of convenience is both prized and precarious, a complexity overlooked by prior studies focused on mature markets (Ng et al., 2023; Xiong, 2022; Zygiaris et al., 2022). In addition, satisfaction mediates these factors' effects on repurchase intention (Afinia, 2024; Bao & Wang, 2021; Edgar & Ellitan, 2024) and this study contends that Cambodia's socioeconomic realities—low digital literacy, pervasive trust deficits, and unequal service access—amplify satisfaction's mediating power, extending beyond generic models to critically reflect local contingencies (Indraswari et al., 2023; Santoso & Ardianti, 2023). Thus, this study suggests the following:

H1: Trustworthiness has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.
H2: Service quality has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.
H3: Convenience has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.
H4: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on the purchase intention.

Trust, service quality, and convenience also directly influence repurchase intentions, requiring critical examination tailored to Cambodia's unique landscape. The direct impact of trust on repurchase intentions is evident in both Shopee Food and the broader e-commerce landscape (Avisca & Djakasaputra, 2024; Lisdayanti & Hapsari, 2024; Ribbink et al., 2004). This issue assumes greater significance in Cambodia, where weak regulations and high perceived risks, such as unverified vendors and unsafe food handling practices, render trust a fundamental element of customer loyalty. This challenges previous views that regarded trust as a secondary factor behind satisfaction (Bangsawan & Roslina, 2024; Daffa & Praswati, 2023). For instance, trust in payment security, eco-friendly practices, and food healthiness directly sustains repeat purchases (Aninda & Roosdhani, 2024; Sun & Moon, 2024), and this study extends this by arguing that Cambodia's trust-scarce environment—unlike the robust frameworks of Indonesia or China—demands a stronger direct link to retention (Jingzu et al., 2024). Service quality has a direct impact on repurchase intentions in both digital and traditional environments (Ali et al., 2021; Ginting et al., 2023; Ikhsan et al., 2023). However, in Cambodia, where unreliable logistics and inconsistent service standards, such as late deliveries and order inaccuracies, are common, this positive effect may diminish unless customer satisfaction can compensate for these issues. This situation raises questions about the previously optimistic views, which were based on more streamlined contexts, such as those in Medan or Jakarta (Aninda & Roosdhani, 2024; Putri & Setiawati, 2021; Ravishankar & Christopher, 2024). Convenience plays a crucial role in driving repurchase intentions, particularly through user-friendly apps and efficient delivery systems (Dalimunthe & Suryani, 2024; Noel et al., 2024; Xiong, 2022). In Cambodia, where digital convenience is a significant factor in adoption, it is complicated by disparities between rural and urban areas as well as delays in delivery. As a result, the impact of convenience may depend more on perceived efficiency rather than actual performance. This offers an important

perspective that contrasts with findings from more developed markets (Memarista & Wijaya, 2024; Santoso & Ardianti, 2023; Tian et al., 2022). Based on these findings, this study hypothesizes the following:

H5: Trustworthiness positively affects repurchase intention
H6: Service quality positively affects repurchase intention
H7: Convenience positively affects repurchase intention

Satisfaction plays a crucial mediating role between trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, and repurchase intention; however, its effectiveness is context-dependent and warrants thorough reevaluation. In Cambodia, where trust is strained by limited consumer safeguards, digital inexperience, and cultural skepticism toward online transactions, satisfaction's mediation is intensified (Lee & Ha, 2023; Susanto & Pandjaitan, 2024; Sya'roni & Fikriah, 2024), and this study critiques prior work for underestimating this dynamic in emerging markets like Southeast Asia, where regulatory gaps widen risk perceptions (Das & Ramalingam, 2023; Foroughi et al., 2024). Trust in food safety, privacy, and reliable service fosters satisfaction that drives repurchase (Dhiya & Marheni, 2024; Setiawati & Nasir, 2024). This study tests whether Cambodia's high-stakes environment, unlike China's stricter oversight, magnifies this mediation (Lin et al., 2024). The relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, mediated by customer satisfaction, is strongly supported across various sectors (Gücal & Gürbüz, 2024; Salsabila, 2023; Tandon et al., 2017). However, Cambodia's infrastructural challenges—such as erratic delivery schedules and inconsistent quality control—may disrupt this connection. This situation calls for a critical reassessment of SERVQUAL's predictive power in less stable environments (Andriyani, 2024; Kumar, 2020; Wu et al., 2024). In developed regions, the relationship between convenience, satisfaction, and repurchase intention is well-established (Indraswari et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2022; Riaz et al., 2022). Conversely, in Cambodia, while convenience is a key motivator for app adoption, it is often affected by logistical challenges and varying levels of user sophistication. As a result, satisfaction may play a disproportionately important role in this context, suggesting that existing theories need to be adapted to accommodate the evolving digital expectations and complexities found in Cambodia (Minseon, 2022; Teng et al., 2023; Zygiaris et al., 2022). Therefore, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

H8: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and the intention to repurchase
H9: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention
H10: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between convenience and repurchase intention

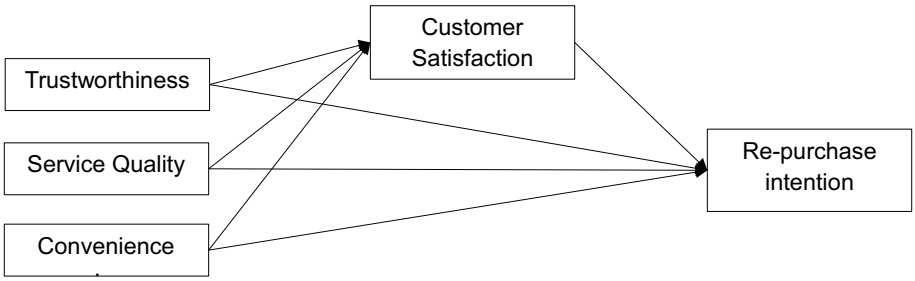

Fig. 1 Analyzed framework

Proposed study model

This study rigorously employs the framework depicted in Fig. 1 to critically examine the roles of trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience as determinants of customer satisfaction and their subsequent impact on repurchase intentions in Cambodia's food delivery app sector. In addition, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the mediating role of customer satisfaction. It examines how it functions as an intermediary variable between trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, and the inclination to repurchase. By focusing on these factors, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on consumer behavior in digital marketplaces, specifically within the context of emerging markets.

Research methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze the factors affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty in Cambodia's food delivery app market. By focusing on key variables, such as trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, customer satisfaction, and repurchase intentions, this study sought to understand how these factors influence repeat usage among Cambodian consumers. A structured questionnaire was developed after a thorough literature review, incorporating items from validated studies on service quality, customer satisfaction, and digital platform trustworthiness, thereby ensuring reliability and validity in capturing relevant constructs. A deductive approach was used to formulate the hypotheses, and the measurement items were adapted from the established literature on consumer behavior in digital platforms, with modifications made to fit the Cambodian market context.

The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree), to ensure consistency across all constructs. Trustworthiness was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Uzir et al. (2021) to assess the perceived reliability and integrity. Customer Satisfaction was captured through a five-item scale adapted from Uzir et al. (2021), focusing on fulfillment and positive experiences. Convenience was measured using a four-item scale that incorporated items from Chowdhury (2023) and Islam et al. (2024), reflecting both accessibility and ease of use. Service Quality was evaluated using a five-item scale adapted from Islam et al. (2024) and Cheng et al. (2021), which captures essential dimensions, such as responsiveness and assurance. Finally, Repurchase Intention was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Foroughi et al. (2024) to gauge participants' likelihood of engaging in

future purchases or interactions. To align with Cambodia's cultural context, items were refined through consultations with local academics and industry professionals, ensuring relevance to Cambodian consumer values, such as trust in local vendors and a preference for convenience over traditional dining.

A purposive sampling method targeted regular users of popular Cambodian food delivery apps (e.g., Nham24, Foodpanda, Meal Temple, E-Gets, GrabFood, WowNow), recruited via social media platforms, such as Facebook and Telegram, which are widely used by digitally active Cambodians. This approach, while effective for accessing the target population, introduces potential biases, such as over-representing urban, tech-savvy users and under-representing rural or less digitally engaged consumers, which may limit generalizability to Cambodia's diverse population. A preliminary test with 30 participants confirmed the relevance and reliability of the questionnaire. Following Soper (2024) for sample size determination, with 22 observed variables, five latent variables, an effect size of 0.3, a significance level of 0.05, and power of 0.95, a minimum sample of 223 was calculated. To enhance reliability and account for incomplete responses, the target was increased by 50%, aiming at 335 participants. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2011). Partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS–SEM) was chosen over covariance-based SEM due to its suitability for exploratory research in emerging markets, where theory is being extended rather than confirmed (Hair et al., 2021). PLS–SEM excels in handling complex models with smaller sample sizes and non-normal data, common in consumer behavior studies like this one, and supports the study's goal of examining new relationships—e.g., trust's heightened role in Cambodia—within an existing framework (Hair et al., 2022). This method provided a structured approach to analyze the interplay of trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, satisfaction, and repurchase intention, extending prior models with context-specific insights.

Demographic profile

The total number of respondents was 324. Of the respondents, 53.4% were male, and 46.6% were female, indicating balanced gender representation. Regarding age, 44.1% of the respondents were between 36 and 52 years, 29.0% were 18–35, and 26.9% were over 53. This age distribution suggests that many respondents were mid-career individuals who were likely familiar with online services and delivery apps. Regarding educational background, nearly half (49.1%) of the respondents had an undergraduate degree, 43.2% had a graduate degree, and 7.7% had a doctorate. This highly educated sample indicates that the respondents may have well-formed perspectives on the factors influencing their satisfaction with and loyalty to food delivery apps.

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model in this study evaluates three forms of validity: content, discriminant, and convergent (Ringle et al., 2020). To establish content validity, the model aligns with the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2013). Specifically, all item loadings for the constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.5 (see Table 1). In addition, each item's loading on its respective construct was higher than its cross-loadings with other constructs, indicating robust content validity (see Table 2). For

Table 1 Factor loadings, reliability, and validity

Trustworthiness (TW) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.855, CR = 0.902, AVE = 0.699)	
TW1-I trust this food delivery app to protect my personal information	0.876
TW2-This food delivery app is dependable	0.889
TW3-I feel confident about the security of transactions on this food delivery app	0.729
TW4-I trust this food delivery app to deliver orders as promised	0.841
Customer Satisfaction (CS) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.839, CR = 0.886, AVE = 0.610)	
CS1-I am satisfied with the overall experience of using this food delivery app	0.702
CS2-This food delivery app meets my expectations	0.822
CS3-I am happy with my decision to use this food delivery app	0.852
CS4-I am satisfied with the quality of service provided by the app	0.765
CS5-Using this food delivery app is a pleasant experience	0.755
Convenience (CV) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.862, CR = 0.906, AVE = 0.709)	
CV1-Using this food delivery app saves me time	0.857
CV2-I find it convenient to order food through this app	0.743
CV3-This app makes it easy to order food anytime, anywhere	0.868
CV4-The app allows me to quickly find what I need	0.891
Service Quality (SQ) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.859, CR = 0.898, AVE = 0.639)	
SQ1-The food delivery app provides prompt service	0.850
SQ2-The app's customer service is responsive to my inquiries	0.817
SQ3-The quality of service provided by this food delivery app meets my expectations	0.864
SQ4-The app makes it easy to find and order food	0.728
SQ5-This food delivery app provides reliable service	0.725
Repurchase Intention (RI) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.875, CR = 0.914, AVE = 0.726)	
RI1-I am likely to use this food delivery app again in the future	0.848
RI2-I intend to continue ordering food through this app	0.851
RI3-I would recommend this food delivery app to others	0.887
RI4-I prefer this app for food delivery over other alternatives	0.821

Table 2 Discriminant validity–Fornell and Larcker criterion

	CS	**CV**	**RI**	**SQ**	**TW**
CS	0.781				
CV	0.416	0.842			
RI	0.433	0.391	0.852		
SQ	0.381	0.470	0.363	0.799	
TW	0.306	0.378	0.316	0.296	0.836
HTMT					
CS	–				
CV	0.481				
RI	0.499	0.441			
SQ	0.438	0.550	0.396		
TW	0.352	0.443	0.357	0.353	–

discriminant validity, the model adheres to Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended criterion, in which the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlation with any other construct (see Table 2). Furthermore, the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio for each construct remains below

the 0.90 threshold, fulfilling the discriminant validity standard suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) (see Table 2). The model also examines relationships between constructs and indicators, with indicators demonstrating factor loadings below 0.60, excluded in accordance with the recommendations of Gefen and Straub (2005); all factor loadings in this study exceed 0.60 (see Table 1), thus supporting the robustness of the model. Convergent validity is further confirmed by AVE values surpassing the 0.50 benchmark, as recommended by Ringle et al. (2020) (see Table 1). For composite reliability (CR), all latent constructs met or exceed the 0.70 threshold, thereby confirming construct reliability (Ringle et al., 2020). In addition, Cronbach's alpha values for each construct met or exceed the 0.70 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), further establishing internal consistency (see Table 1).

Structural model analysis

To evaluate multicollinearity among the constructs, we conducted a multicollinearity test using the variance inflation factor (VIF). Hair et al. (2011) state that a VIF exceeding 5.0 or below 0.20 can indicate problematic multicollinearity in PLS–SEM. The VIF values in this analysis ranged from 1.4 to 3.0, demonstrating no significant multicollinearity issues. In addition, this study performed Harman's single-factor test to assess common method bias (CMB) (Fuller et al., 2016; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Exploratory factor analysis revealed that a single factor explained 30.5% of the variance, suggesting that CMB was not a concern. This study conducted a structural model analysis after verifying the construct's validity and reliability. Key indicators, such as the coefficient of determination (R2), Stone–Geisser criterion (Q2), path coefficients (β), and path significance, were used to evaluate model quality. The hypotheses were tested using standardized path coefficients, and the goodness of fit of each structural path was assessed. Following Cohen (2013), R2 values of 0.02–0.12 suggest weak predictive capability, 0.13–0.25 moderate predictive capability, and values above 0.26 strong predictive capability, respectively. The R2 values in this study were 0.235 and 0.274 for CS and RI, respectively, indicating a moderate predictive capability. In addition, Q2 was applied to assess the predictive relevance of endogenous constructs, where values above 0 implied significant predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). The Q2 results of 0.133 for CS and 0.190 for RI underscored the model's strong predictive relevance (see Table 3).

Table 3 Hypotheses testing

	Path coefficient	*t* value	*p* value	Decision
H1: TW→CS	0.144	2.382	0.017	Supported
H2: SQ→CS	0.216	3.091	0.002	Supported
H3: CV→CS	0.260	4.848	0.000	Supported
H4: CS→RI	0.270	4.370	0.000	Supported
H5: TW→RI	0.130	2.289	0.022	Supported
H6: SQ→RI	0.146	2.384	0.017	Supported
H7: CV→RI	0.161	2.520	0.012	Supported
		R^2		Q^2
CS		0.235		0.133
RI		0.274		0.190

The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was also evaluated, as it is critical in PLS–SEM to minimize model misspecification (Hair et al., 2022). SRMR measures the discrepancy between observed and predicted correlations (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and assesses the model's overall fit. Although no definitive SRMR threshold has been established in PLS–SEM (Hair et al., 2022), many researchers suggest that values below 0.10 indicate an acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In this study, SRMR was 0.07, indicating a satisfactory model fit. Finally, the hypotheses were tested to evaluate the significance of the relationships and the overall model fit (see Table 3).

First, Trustworthiness (TW) was found to have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.144$, $t = 2.382$, $p = 0.017$), supporting H1. This indicates that customers who perceive food delivery apps as trustworthy are more likely to feel satisfied with the service. Service Quality (SQ) also demonstrated a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 3.091$, $p = 0.002$), supporting H2, which suggests that high-quality service leads to greater customer satisfaction. Convenience (CV), the ease and accessibility of using the apps, showed the strongest influence on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.260$, $t = 4.848$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3 and emphasizing the value that customers place on the convenience of food delivery services. In addition, customer satisfaction (CS) itself emerged as a strong predictor of repurchase intention (RI), with a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 4.370$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4 and suggesting that satisfied customers are more likely to use the service again. Trustworthiness also positively influences repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.130$, $t = 2.289$, $p = 0.022$), supporting H5. This implies that when customers perceive an app as trustworthy, they are more inclined to repurchase. Service Quality also positively affected repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.146$, $t = 2.384$, $p = 0.017$), supporting H6 and highlighting the importance of maintaining high service standards to encourage repeat use. Finally, Convenience also positively influences repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.161$, $t = 2.520$, $p = 0.012$), supporting H7 and underscoring the critical role of easy access and user-friendly features in promoting the continued usage of food delivery apps.

To assess the mediating role of customer satisfaction, the approach outlined by Zhao et al. (2010) was applied: evaluating whether each independent variable influences repurchase intention both directly and through customer satisfaction. Statistical findings are

Table 4 Mediation analysis

	Total effects		**Direct effects**	
	Coefficient	***t* value**	**Coefficient**	***t* value**
TW→RI	0.168	2.986	0.130	2.289
SQ→RI	0.205	3.352	0.146	2.384
CV→RI	0.231	3.768	0.161	2.520
Indirect effects				
	Coefficient	***t* value**	***p* value**	**CI[2.5–97.5%]**
H8: TW→CS→RI	0.039	2.017	0.044	.006–.082
H9: SQ→CS→RI	0.058	2.370	0.018	.017–.111
H10: CV→CS→RI	0.070	3.228	0.001	.034–.120

conveyed succinctly, focusing on their practical significance, with bootstrapping using 5,000 subsamples to establish robust results, including 95% confidence intervals (CI) for precision (Hair et al., 2016). For the Trustworthiness to Customer Satisfaction to Repurchase Intention pathway (H8), it indicated (Table 4) that trustworthiness has a total effect on repurchase intention (β = 0.168, t = 2.986) and a direct effect (β = 0.130, t = 2.289), suggesting trust alone encourages customers to reorder. Trustworthiness also enhances satisfaction, contributing to an indirect effect (β = 0.039, t = 2.017, p = 0.044, CI [0.006, 0.082]). The CI confirms significance, as it excludes zero. This partial mediation, as defined by Zhao et al. (2010), suggests that trustworthiness directly influences repeat orders while also enhancing satisfaction, providing a modest boost to repurchase intent. Thus, a reliable app demonstrates how trust prompts return orders, with added satisfaction providing a small extra incentive. In the Service Quality to Customer Satisfaction to Repurchase Intention pathway (H9), as indicated in Table 4, a total effect of service quality on repurchase intention (β = 0.205, t = 3.352) and a direct effect (coefficient = 0.146, t = 2.384), implying dependable service motivates reordering independently. Service quality also improves satisfaction, yielding an indirect effect (β = 0.058, t = 2.370, p = 0.018, CI [0.017, 0.111]), with the confidence interval (CI) reinforcing significance by remaining above zero. This partial mediation suggests that high-quality service directly fosters loyalty while also enhancing customer satisfaction, thereby providing an additional incentive for repeat orders. Hence, a timely delivery illustrates how reliability encourages future use, as the positive experience strengthens the choice. For the Convenience to Customer Satisfaction to Repurchase Intention pathway (H10), it revealed a total effect of convenience on repurchase intention (β = 0.231, t = 3.768) and a direct effect (β = 0.161, t = 2.520), indicating that an easy-to-use app can sustain loyalty on its own (Table 4). Convenience also increases satisfaction, producing an indirect effect (β = 0.070, t = 3.228, p = 0.001, CI [0.034, 0.120]). The confidence interval (CI) underscores a strong, positive impact, as it remains above zero. This partial mediation suggests that convenience directly impacts the decision to reorder, while also enhancing satisfaction, further solidifying the intent. Thus, a streamlined ordering process shows how ease keeps customers returning, with satisfaction reinforcing their commitment.

These results, detailed in Table 4, confirm that customer satisfaction supports the links between trustworthiness, service quality, convenience, and repurchase intention, with each factor also exerting a direct influence. The 95% CIs in Table 4 clarify the reliability of these effects, consistently showing positive ranges. This interplay offers valuable insights for Cambodia's food delivery apps, as elaborated in the discussion section.

Discussion

The findings reveal a cohesive and significant influence of trustworthiness (TW), Service Quality (SQ), and convenience (CV) on Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Repurchase Intention (RI) in Cambodia's food delivery app sector. This illustrates the interconnected nature of each factor in influencing customer loyalty. Trustworthiness (TW) has a significant effect on customer satisfaction (CS) in Cambodia, where privacy concerns are particularly high. This suggests that food delivery apps must prioritize secure and trustworthy transactions to build satisfaction and foster loyalty, as highlighted by Tang et al. (2023), who found that trust plays a critical role in consumer retention in competitive

markets such as retail. Similarly, the importance of service quality in enhancing customer satisfaction and influencing repurchase intention is emphasized, particularly in terms of consistency and reliability. This aligns with findings from Dalimunthe and Suryani (2024), who also emphasize the importance of a user-friendly design. However, in Cambodia, the consistent delivery of high-quality service appears even more crucial. The significant role of convenience in repurchase intentions underscores the importance of providing fast and accessible services, a preference that appears to be stronger in Cambodia compared to other regions, as also suggested by Dilotsotlhe and Makhubela (2024), who found that convenience is a key driver of customer loyalty in emerging markets, and Ella and Navneet (2023), who highlighted the role of convenience and e-service quality in building customer loyalty on food delivery apps.

In addition, trustworthiness is found to directly influence repurchase intention, consistent with the research on the role of trust in long-term customer relationships (Aninda & Roosdhani, 2024). In Cambodia, concerns about data security are particularly sensitive, underscoring the crucial role of trust in fostering loyalty. Service quality also directly impacts repurchase intention, confirming the findings of Ginting et al. (2023). Cambodian consumers place a high value on sustained service quality, which is necessary to maintain their loyalty. Similarly, the significant role of convenience in repurchase intentions underscores the importance of providing fast and accessible services, a preference that appears to be stronger in Cambodia compared to other regions, as also suggested by Llanos et al. (2023) in their study of service convenience in emerging markets.

This study also highlighted the mediating role of customer satisfaction, particularly in linking trustworthiness to repurchase intention. This mediation aligns with Edgar and Ellitan (2024), who argue that trust alone is insufficient for ensuring loyalty. In Cambodia, building trust must go hand in hand with maintaining satisfaction. Satisfaction also mediates between service quality and repurchase intention, reinforcing findings from Salsabila (2023). For Cambodian users, satisfaction derived from quality services amplifies the effect of service quality on loyalty, indicating the critical role of maintaining high standards. Finally, satisfaction mediates the relationship between convenience and repurchase intention, indicating that for Cambodian users, easy and user-friendly services are crucial for loyalty, underscoring the importance of convenience in creating satisfying experiences.

This study highlights that in Cambodia's food delivery market, trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience are closely tied to customer satisfaction, which is a crucial factor in driving repurchase. The strong interconnectedness of these factors offers valuable insights for companies seeking to boost customer loyalty in this market. The practical implications of this study are significant for companies operating in Cambodia's food delivery app sector. To strengthen their position in the market, businesses should prioritize establishing trustworthiness through secure, transparent data management practices. This is especially important in Cambodia, where concerns about privacy are high. Food delivery apps should reassure users by ensuring the privacy and security of their personal data, as evidenced by Tang et al. (2023), who advocate for robust data protection to enhance user trust in competitive environments. In terms of service quality, companies should focus on delivering consistent and reliable service, which Cambodian users highly value. Adhering to high-quality standards will contribute significantly

to customer satisfaction and retention. Ultimately, the study highlights the significance of convenience in fostering customer loyalty. Food delivery apps should prioritize user-friendly interfaces, fast service, personalized recommendations, and simplified payment options to enhance the user experience and encourage repeat usage. Furthermore, the findings from this study are not only relevant to Cambodia's food delivery market but also extend to the broader retail trade sector, both digital and physical. This connection between the food delivery market and retail trade highlights the broader implications for the historical and spatial evolution of retail businesses, as emphasized by Manioudis and Meramveliotakis (2023). Their work discusses the historical development and restructuring of retail trade in Greece, noting that the sector's spatial and organizational transformations have been critical to its growth. Similarly, trust, service quality, and convenience have evolved as key drivers of customer loyalty in both historical and modern retail environments. Moreover, the broader retail sector, including both physical and digital stores, must prioritize secure transactions, data privacy, and service quality to remain competitive. These factors are essential to meeting the evolving needs of consumers, particularly as businesses operate in both digital and physical spaces. By understanding these connections, retail businesses can gain a competitive edge in an increasingly digital world, just as food delivery apps can benefit from improving trust and convenience within their service offerings.

Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into the determinants of customer loyalty in Cambodia's food delivery app sector, examining the roles of trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience in influencing customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Grounded in the Commitment-Trust Theory and the SERVQUAL model, this research highlights the significant role trust plays in digital environments with limited regulatory oversight, particularly in emerging markets such as Cambodia, in influencing customer satisfaction and subsequent loyalty. Similarly, service quality, a crucial pillar of the SERVQUAL model, has demonstrated a strong positive relationship with satisfaction and loyalty, with consistency in service delivery emerging as a key priority among Cambodian users. Convenience was also confirmed as a significant driver of satisfaction and repurchase intentions, a finding that reflects users' preferences for efficient and streamlined digital services.

The scientific value of this research lies in its empirical confirmation that customer satisfaction is a crucial mediator, bridging the effects of trust, service quality, and convenience on repurchase intentions in emerging digital markets. Quantitatively, these findings reveal that each factor exerts a statistically significant influence on satisfaction, with service quality and convenience exhibiting particularly strong effects, aligning with and extending previous work in more developed markets. In addition, compared with benchmarks from studies in Southeast Asia and other regions, this study reveals an intensified preference for trust and convenience within Cambodia, underscoring the need for secure, reliable, and user-friendly platforms. This context-specific insight enriches the existing literature by illustrating that, while trust, quality, and convenience universally contribute to customer loyalty, the prioritization and impact of these factors vary regionally, especially in emerging economies.

This study makes several theoretical contributions to existing literature. First, it extends Commitment-Trust Theory by demonstrating that the impact of trust on customer satisfaction and loyalty is even more pronounced in digital services within emerging markets. In Cambodia's food delivery sector, where users are particularly concerned about data privacy and security, this study supports Morgan and Hunt's (1994) foundational argument that trust is critical to maintaining customer relationships. In addition, this study advances the SERVQUAL model by empirically validating its dimensions in the context of an emerging digital market. While the SERVQUAL model has traditionally been applied in developed markets, this study shows that it remains relevant in Cambodia, albeit with a stronger emphasis on consistency and reliability in service delivery. Finally, the study highlights the growing importance of convenience in digital service satisfaction and loyalty, offering theoretical support for including convenience as a core factor in understanding consumer behavior on digital platforms, particularly in regions experiencing rapid digital adoption.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the factors driving customer loyalty in Cambodia's food delivery app sector, it has some limitations. First, the study is geographically limited to Cambodia, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other emerging or developed markets. Cultural, economic, and regulatory differences can influence how trustworthiness, service quality, and convenience impact customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions in other regions. In addition, the study relied on cross-sectional data to capture user attitudes and behaviors at a single point in time. This approach limits the ability to observe changes over time, particularly as digital service expectations evolve rapidly. A longitudinal study can provide a more dynamic understanding of the development of these relationships. Furthermore, this study primarily used self-reported data, which may be subject to biases, such as social desirability or recall bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Finally, while this study focuses on specific factors, such as trust, service quality, and convenience, other variables may also influence customer loyalty, including price sensitivity and promotional incentives, which were not included in the analysis. Future research could address these limitations by exploring additional factors, conducting longitudinal studies, or comparing similar markets to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants of customer loyalty in digital services.

Author contributions
The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of this study, including the conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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Data availability
Data available on request from the authors.

Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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