



SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, AND OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF FAST-FOOD CENTERS IN TANDAG CITY: BASIS FOR AN ENHANCED INTERVENTION PLAN

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ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively investigated the interrelationships among service quality dimensions, customer satisfaction levels, and operational effectiveness in fast-food centers operating within Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design, quantitative data were gathered from 341 primary respondents—comprising 275 customers, 11 fast-food managers/owners, and 55 service staff—across 11 major fast-food establishments (including Crispy King, Dale Food, Goldbar Restaurant, Jollibee, Lasamgy, Mandarin, McDonald's, Minute Burger, Shacene Restaurant, Tuna Republic, and Uptown Coffee). Qualitative insights were simultaneously garnered through in-depth interviews with 16 key informants (managers, elderly customers, child customers, regular patrons, and service crew).

Quantitative assessments revealed that the overall service quality across five key SERVQUAL dimensions (Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy) was rated at a 'Greatest Extent' (Overall Weighted Mean = 4.59). Assurance emerged as the highest-performing dimension (WM = 4.65), while Responsiveness ranked lowest (WM = 4.55). Customer satisfaction across six domains (Speed of Service, Food Quality, Customer

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Care and Relations, Pricing, Ambiance, and Safety and Security) attained an overall rating of 'Very Satisfied' (Overall Weighted Mean = 4.59). Food Quality received the highest satisfaction (WM = 4.64), whereas Ambiance received the lowest relative score (WM = 4.57). Operational effectiveness was similarly rated as 'Very Effective' (Overall WM = 4.61), led by Inventory Control (WM = 4.66) and workforce management.

Hypothesis testing via Pearson r correlation demonstrated highly significant positive relationships between service quality dimensions and operational effectiveness ($r = 0.842$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between customer satisfaction and operational effectiveness ($r = 0.815$, $p < 0.01$), rejecting both null hypotheses (HO1 and HO2). Qualitative findings underscored lived experiences regarding rush-hour service bottlenecks, food temperature consistency, and physical seating constraints. Based on these findings, an actionable, multi-phase Strategic Intervention Plan is proposed to optimize service workflows, digitalize inventory/order systems, and elevate staff training standards.

Keywords: *Service Quality, SERVQUAL Model, Customer Satisfaction, Operational Effectiveness, Fast-Food Industry, Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Intervention Plan*

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INTRODUCTION

The global fast-food industry has experienced unprecedented growth over recent decades, fueled by rapid urbanization, changing lifestyle demands, and an escalating consumer preference for quick, accessible, and affordable dining solutions. In modern society, quick-service restaurants (QSRs) are no longer merely convenience-driven alternatives; they have become vital social hubs and key contributors to local commercial economies. As market density increases and consumer discernment heightens, maintaining superior service quality and sustaining high levels of customer satisfaction have become essential imperatives for commercial survival and long-term business viability.

Service quality serves as the bedrock of customer perception in hospitality environments. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1990) established the seminal SERVQUAL framework, which evaluates service excellence across five standardized dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Contemporary quick-service literature (Ryu et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2020) continues to affirm that consistent, high-standard execution across these five pillars directly correlates with heightened customer contentment and brand loyalty. Parallely, Oliver's (1997) Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory posits that satisfaction is a cognitive and affective response arising from the comparison between pre-consumption expectations and real-time perceived performance. In fast-paced dining sectors, operational factors such as order fulfillment speed, meal flavor consistency, ambiance comfort, pricing fairness, and physical safety exert immense influence on overall customer evaluation.

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1.1 Background and Context of Tandag City

Tandag City, the capital of the province of Surigao del Sur in the Caraga Region of Mindanao, Philippines, represents a rapidly evolving socio-economic ecosystem. As a thriving administrative, commercial, and educational hub, Tandag City has witnessed a substantial expansion of quick-service food establishments. National fast-food giants (such as Jollibee and McDonald's) operate alongside well-established local enterprises (such as Goldbar Restaurant, Shacene Restaurant, and Uptown Coffee) and specialized quick-bite outlets (Crispy King, Minute Burger, Tuna Republic, Lasamgy, Mandarin, and Dale Food). This dynamic competitive environment offers local consumers an increasingly diverse array of dining choices.

However, existing academic literature on fast-food service quality and customer satisfaction predominantly focuses on major metropolitan centers (such as Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, or Davao City). Regional urban centers like Tandag City present distinct socio-economic dynamics, localized consumer expectations, unique cultural dining habits, and specific supply chain constraint profiles. Generalized urban service models often fail to capture the nuanced realities of small-to-medium regional cities. Without empirical data rooted in localized settings, fast-food operators risk implementing standardized service strategies that fail to resonate with local market preferences or effectively address operational vulnerabilities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to comprehensively evaluate the Quality of Service, Customer Satisfaction, and Operational Effectiveness among Fast Food Centers in Tandag City, Surigao

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del Sur, as the empirical foundation for a proposed strategic intervention plan. Specifically, the research sought to answer the following sub-problems:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the respondents as to: Gender, Age, Type of Customer, Income Level, Frequency of Visit, Location of Business, and Operating Hours?
2. What is the extent of Service Quality Dimensions of Fast Food Centers in terms of: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy?
3. What satisfaction level do customers experience among Fast Food Centers in Tandag City in terms of: Speed of Service, Food Quality, Customer Care and Relations, Pricing of Foods and related products, Ambiance, and Safety and Security?
4. How effective are the operations of Fast Food Centers in Tandag City as to the needs of types of customers in terms of: Menu Creation and Food Preparation, Workforce Management, Inventory Control, Customer Service and Experience, and Staying Current with Industry Trends?
5. Is there a significant relationship between service quality dimensions and the effectiveness of operations of Fast Food Centers in Tandag City?
6. Is there a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of operations of Fast Food Centers in Tandag City?
7. What are the lived experiences encountered by customers, managers, and staff in these fast food centers?

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8. What actionable intervention plan can be proposed to improve service quality, customer satisfaction, and operational performance?

1.3 Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- HO1: There is no significant relationship between service quality dimensions and the effectiveness of operations of Fast Food Centers in Tandag City.
- HO2: There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of operations of Fast Food Centers in Tandag City.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on three primary paradigms: Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1990) SERVQUAL Framework, Richard Oliver's (1997) Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), and Total Quality Management (TQM) operational principles. Additionally, Brady and Cronin's (2001) Hierarchical Service Quality Model and Cronin and Taylor's (1992) SERVPERF performance-only approach inform the analytical interpretation of service delivery.

The conceptual framework follows an Input-Process-Output-Outcome model represented structurally across three interconnected boxes:

- Box 1 (Independent Variables): Comprises (a) Demographic Profile of respondents (Gender, Age, Customer Type, Income Level, Visit Frequency, Business Location, Operating Hours); (b) Service Quality Dimensions (Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy);

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and (c) Customer Satisfaction Domains (Speed of Service, Food Quality, Customer Care/Relations, Pricing, Ambiance, Safety & Security).

- Box 2 (Dependent Variable): Pertains to the Operational Effectiveness of Fast Food Centers across core functional areas: Menu Creation & Food Preparation, Workforce Management, Inventory Control, Customer Service & Experience, and Industry Trend Adoption.
- Box 3 (Actionable Output): Proposed Strategic Intervention Plan formulated to systematically enhance service quality, resolve operational bottlenecks, and elevate overall customer satisfaction.

Significance of the Study: The findings offer actionable insights for Fast-Food Operators (guiding workflow optimization, staff training, and facility management), Customers (empowering informed dining choices), Local Government & Regulators (informing sanitation, consumer safety, and commercial zoning policies), and Future Researchers (providing localized baseline empirical data for comparative food service studies).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter outlines the methodological framework, research design, participant sampling techniques, data collection instruments, field procedures, and statistical treatment tools utilized in this study.

Research Design: A mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was employed, combining quantitative survey metrics with qualitative in-depth interviews. Numerical statistics

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quantified the extent of service quality dimensions, customer satisfaction levels, and operational effectiveness. Qualitative phenomenology captured the nuanced lived experiences, contextual challenges, and operational feedback of various stakeholder groups.

Research Environment and Respondents: The study was conducted in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur. The quantitative phase involved 341 total primary respondents, categorized into 11 fast-food center managers/owners, 55 service staff/crew, and 275 active customers distributed across 11 major fast-food establishments. The qualitative phase engaged 16 key informants (2 managers, 2 child customers, 2 elderly customers, 3 staff crew members, and 7 regular adult patrons).

Table 1. Distribution of Quantitative Research Respondents Across Fast Food Centers

Fast Food Centers	Managers / Owners	Staff / Crew	Customers	Total
Crispy King	1	5	25	31
Dale Food	1	5	25	31
Goldbar Restaurant	1	5	25	31
Jollibee	1	5	25	31
Lasamgy	1	5	25	31
Mandarin	1	5	25	31
McDonald's	1	5	25	31
Minute Burger	1	5	25	31

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Shacene	1	5	25	31
Restaurant				
Tuna Republic	1	5	25	31
Uptown Coffee	1	5	25	31
Grand Total (%)	11 (3.22%)	55 (16.13%)	275 (80.65%)	341 (100.0%)
Total)				

Research Instruments and Data Gathering: Data collection relied on two structured instruments: (1) A validated 5-point Likert scale quantitative questionnaire measuring SERVQUAL dimensions, satisfaction factors, and operational metrics; and (2) A semi-structured qualitative interview guide designed to explore lived dining experiences, operational delays, and service expectations. Pre-testing and expert panel validation confirmed instrument content validity. Formal written permissions were secured from store managers prior to field survey distribution. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained pursuant to Philippine Data Privacy Act protocols.

Statistical Treatment: Data were tabulated and analyzed using the following tools:

- Frequency and Percentage Distribution: Used to summarize demographic profiles.
- Weighted Mean (WM): Utilized to compute average extent, satisfaction, and effectiveness ratings across groups.
- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (r): Executed at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance to test HO1 and HO2.

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- *****
- Qualitative Thematic Analysis: Applied to transcribe, code, and synthesize interview responses into core experiential themes.

Interpretation Scales:

- Service Quality Extent: 4.20–5.00 (Greatest Extent / Always Manifested); 3.40–4.19 (Greater Extent / Oftentimes); 2.60–3.39 (Less Extent / Sometimes); 1.80–2.59 (Least Extent / Rarely); 1.00–1.79 (No Extent At All).
- Customer Satisfaction: 4.20–5.00 (Very Satisfied); 3.40–4.19 (Satisfied); 2.60–3.39 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied); 1.80–2.59 (Dissatisfied); 1.00–1.79 (Very Dissatisfied).
- Operational Effectiveness: 4.20–5.00 (Very Effective); 3.40–4.19 (Effective); 2.60–3.39 (Less Effective); 1.80–2.59 (Least Effective); 1.00–1.79 (Not Effective At All).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Demographic Profile Analysis

A holistic evaluation of demographic profiles across all 341 primary respondents (Table 2) reveals critical insights into the socio-demographic composition of fast-food consumers, staff, and management in Tandag City.

Table 2. Consolidated Summary of Demographic Characteristics Across All Respondent Groups

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Variable	Category	Customers (n=275)	Managers (n=11)	Staff (n=55)	Total (N=341)	Overall %
Sex	Male	143	7	41	191	56.01%
	Female	132	4	14	150	43.99%
Age	11 – 19 years	46	0	0	46	13.49%
	20 – 29 years	123	4	46	173	50.73%
	30 – 39 years	70	5	9	84	24.63%
	40 – 49 years	36	2	0	38	11.14%
	50 – 59 years	10	0	0	10	2.93%
Income Level	Below ₱20,000	269	7	55	331	97.07%
	₱20,001 – ₱30,000	6	4	0	10	2.93%
Visit Frequency	Always	12	3	34	49	14.37%
	Oftentimes	260	8	21	289	84.75%

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	Sometimes	3	0	0	3	0.88%
Location	Very	6	2	24	32	9.38%
	Accessible					
	Accessible	269	9	31	309	90.62%
Operating	8:00 AM –	275	11	55	341	100.0%
Hours	5:00 PM					
Customer	Adults	229	11	55	295	86.51%
Type						
	Children	46	0	0	46	13.49%

Demographic Discussion: Gender distribution among customers shows a balanced split (52% male vs. 48% female), indicating that quick-service dining in Tandag City transcends gender divisions due to universal convenience needs. However, store staff is predominantly male (74.55%), reflecting physical demands and localized shift work norms. Age distribution confirms that young adults aged 20–29 form the predominant consumer base (44.73% of customers) and the core frontline workforce (83.64% of staff), driven by high mobility and dynamic schedules. Crucially, 97.07% of all respondents earn below ₱20,000 monthly, highlighting that fast-food centers operate as primary budget-friendly food sources.

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3.2 Assessment of Service Quality Dimensions (SERVQUAL)

Table 3 summarizes the overall extent of service quality across the five standard dimensions as assessed by customers, managers, and staff members.

Table 3. Consolidated Extent of Service Quality Dimensions Across Stakeholder Groups

Dimension	Customers (WM)	Managers (WM)	Staff (WM)	Overall Mean	Adjectival Description	Rank
Tangibility	4.36	4.83	4.62	4.60	Greatest Extent	2
Reliability	4.40	4.82	4.56	4.59	Greatest Extent	3
Responsiveness	4.37	4.84	4.45	4.55	Greatest Extent	5
Assurance	4.52	4.82	4.60	4.65	Greatest Extent	1
Empathy	4.45	4.84	4.45	4.58	Greatest Extent	4
Overall Service Quality	4.42	4.83	4.54	4.59	Greatest Extent	--

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Service Quality Discussion: All five dimensions were rated at 'Greatest Extent' (Overall Mean = 4.59). Assurance ranked 1st (WM = 4.65), demonstrating that staff courtesy, operational competence, and security foster strong customer trust. Tangibility ranked 2nd (WM = 4.60), bolstered by odor-free environments (WM = 4.71) and modern exteriors, although table/floor cleaning speed during rush hours scored slightly lower (WM = 4.56). Responsiveness ranked lowest (WM = 4.55), pointing to perceived delays during peak dining hours (WM = 4.30). A noticeable perception gap exists between managers (WM = 4.83) and customers (WM = 4.42), indicating managerial over-optimism relative to real-time customer experience.

3.3 Evaluation of Customer Satisfaction Levels

Customer satisfaction across six critical operational domains was evaluated across all respondent cohorts (Table 4).

Table 4. Consolidated Customer Satisfaction Levels Across Operational Domains

Satisfaction Domain	Customers (WM)	Managers (WM)	Staff (WM)	Overall Mean	Adjectival Description	Rank
Speed of Service	4.36	4.82	4.60	4.59	Very Satisfied	3.5
Food Quality	4.44	4.88	4.60	4.64	Very Satisfied	1

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Customer	4.51	4.82	4.42	4.58	Very	5
Care & Relations					Satisfied	
Pricing of	4.43	4.74	4.56	4.58	Very	5
Foods & Products					Satisfied	
Ambiance	4.29	4.82	4.60	4.57	Very	6
					Satisfied	
Safety and	4.38	4.82	4.60	4.60	Very	2
Security					Satisfied	
Overall	4.40	4.82	4.56	4.59	Very	--
Customer Satisfaction					Satisfied	

Customer Satisfaction Discussion: Food Quality emerged as the top satisfaction driver (WM = 4.64, Rank 1), led by proper food preparation and cookery (WM = 4.69) and flavor consistency. Safety and Security ranked 2nd (WM = 4.60), reflecting effective hygiene protocols and store safety. Ambiance ranked lowest (WM = 4.57), primarily due to lower customer scores on overall welcoming atmosphere (WM = 4.09) and peak-hour indoor temperature control (WM = 4.21). Speed of service scored well overall (WM = 4.59), but

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peak-hour queue management received lower customer ratings (WM = 4.17), highlighting workflow bottlenecks during lunch and dinner rushes.

3.4 Effectiveness of Fast-Food Center Operations

The operational effectiveness of fast-food centers was evaluated across five vital management domains (Table 5).

Table 5. Consolidated Operational Effectiveness Across Management Domains

Operational Domain	Customers (WM)	Managers (WM)	Staff (WM)	Overall Mean	Adjectival Description	Rank
Menu Creation & Food Prep	4.41	4.85	4.58	4.61	Very Effective	3
Workforce Management	4.43	4.88	4.62	4.64	Very Effective	2
Inventory Control	4.48	4.91	4.60	4.66	Very Effective	1
Customer Service & Experience	4.38	4.82	4.55	4.58	Very Effective	4

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Staying	4.30	4.80	4.48	4.53	Very	5
Current with					Effective	
Trends						
Overall	4.40	4.85	4.57	4.61	Very	--
Effectiveness					Effective	

Operational Effectiveness Discussion: Operations were rated as 'Very Effective' (Overall Mean = 4.61). Inventory Control ranked highest (WM = 4.66), reflecting robust stock management that prevents stockouts of popular menu items. Workforce Management ranked 2nd (WM = 4.64), supported by structured shift routines. Conversely, Staying Current with Industry Trends ranked lowest (WM = 4.53), due to slow digital kiosk adoption and limited online food delivery integrations in Tandag City.

3.5 Inferential Statistical Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

Table 6. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis Testing

Paired Variables	Computed Pearson r	p-value	Significance Level	Decision on Null	Interpretation
Service Quality vs. Operational	0.842	< 0.001	0.05	Reject HO1	Statistically Significant / Very Strong Positive

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Effectiveness

(HO1)

Customer	0.815	< 0.001	0.05	Reject HO2	Statistically
Satisfaction					Significant /
vs.					Very Strong
Operational					Positive
Effectiveness					
(HO2)					

Hypothesis Testing Discussion: The statistical analysis firmly rejects both null hypotheses. A strong positive correlation exists between Service Quality and Operational Effectiveness ($r = 0.842$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that high service standards directly depend on efficient back-of-house operations. Similarly, Customer Satisfaction highly correlates with Operational Effectiveness ($r = 0.815$, $p < 0.001$), proving that optimized operational workflows are paramount for driving customer delight and brand loyalty.

3.6 Qualitative Synthesis of Lived Experiences

Thematic analysis of the 16 in-depth qualitative interviews yielded three core experiential themes:

1. Rush-Hour Service Bottlenecks & Order Queuing: Customers frequently noted extended waiting times during 11:30 AM–1:00 PM and 5:30 PM–7:00 PM peak periods. Counter staff confirmed stress during sudden surges, corroborating quantitative responsiveness gaps.

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2. Ambiance Constraints & Seating Availability: Regular adult patrons and elderly customers noted crowding and elevated noise levels during lunch peak, alongside occasional delays in dining room table clearing.

3. Food Quality Appreciation vs. Customization Desire: While food flavor and heat were widely praised, younger consumers expressed a desire for enhanced menu customization (e.g., build-your-own meals) and digital ordering channels.

4. Proposed Strategic Intervention Plan

Based on the empirical findings, the following multi-phase Strategic Intervention Plan is established to address operational bottlenecks, enhance responsiveness during peak hours, optimize ambiance maintenance, and accelerate digital adoption in Tandag City fast-food centers.

Table 7. Comprehensive Strategic Intervention Plan for Fast-Food Centers in Tandag City

Key Area	Focus	Strategic Objective	Proposed Intervention Action	Responsible Persons	Timeframe	Success Metric
Service		Eliminate	Implement	Store	1 – 3	Average
Responsiveness & Speed	peak-hour order delays	Dual-Line Ordering	Managers,	Months	order wait time reduced	

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& queue System & Shift to under 4					
bottlenecks Express Supervisors minutes					
Pickup					
Counters					
during rush					
hours					
Dining	Maintain	Deploy	Store	Immediate	100% table
Ambiance &	continuous	Dedicated	Operators,	(1 Month)	clearance
Cleanliness	clean table	Floor Busser	Maintenance		within 2 mins
	availability &	during peak	Staff		of customer
	temperature	hours;			departure
	control	upgrade			
		HVAC air			
		conditioning			
		maintenance			
Customer	Elevate	Conduct	HR	Quarterly	Customer
Care & Issue	frontline	mandatory	Managers,		complaint
Resolution	empathetic	'Service	Operations		resolution
	communicatio	Excellence &	Trainers		rate above
		De-			95%

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n & dispute escalation'

handling workshops

for crew

Digital Adoption	Trend	Expand	Integrate	Store	3	–	6	20%
		customer	POS mobile	Owners, IT	Months			increase in
		convenience	ordering app	Vendors				digital/takeo
		via digital	& local					ut order
		ordering	delivery					volume
		channels	platform					
			partnerships					

Staff & Compensation	Welfare	Reduce turnover	staff and	Implement Performance-Based Incentive Bonus & structured shift scheduling	Managemen t, HR	Ongoing	25% reduction in annual staff turnover rate
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Conclusion

1. Demographic Alignment: Fast-food centers in Tandag City primarily serve budget-conscious young adults and family units earning below ₱20,000 monthly. Operating schedules (8:00 AM – 5:00 PM) and accessible store locations effectively align with local community routines.

2. Service Quality Excellence: Service quality across Tandag City QSRs is maintained at a 'Greatest Extent' (WM = 4.59), with Assurance emerging as the strongest pillar. However, Responsiveness during peak hours represents the primary area requiring operational refinement.

3. High Customer Satisfaction: Customers are 'Very Satisfied' overall (WM = 4.59), prioritizing Food Quality and Safety. Ambiance and thermal dining room comfort represent secondary areas for physical upgrade.

4. Operational Effectiveness: Operational practices are 'Very Effective' (WM = 4.61), underpinned by exceptional Inventory Control. Modern digital ordering trends remain underdeveloped and offer substantial growth potential.

5. Strong Empirical Interdependence: Inferential correlation confirms that operational effectiveness directly dictates both service quality ($r = 0.842$) and customer satisfaction ($r =$

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0.815). Implementing the proposed Strategic Intervention Plan will ensure sustained operational excellence.



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