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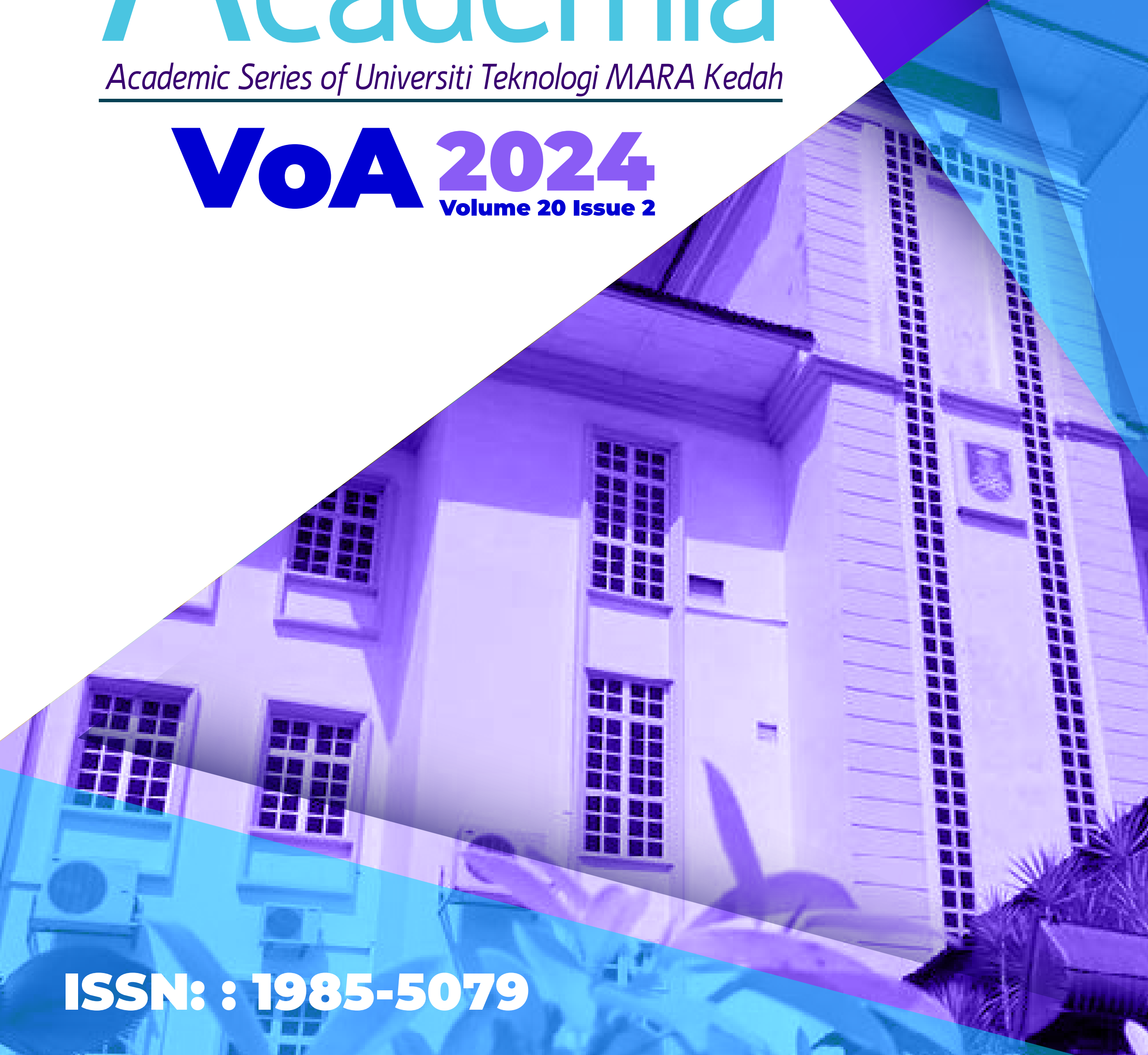

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UNRAVELLING THE NEXUS: A CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SELF-CONGRUITY, SATISFACTION, AND BRAND LOYALTY IN URBAN COFFEE SHOPS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to investigate a potential study field concerning brand loyalty in coffee shops, as well as the mediating role self-congruity and overall satisfaction play in the relationship between the two. Recently, there has been a worldwide increase in the demand for coffee shops, and it is anticipated that this trend will continue to grow in the future. Consequently, customers' brand loyalty has become more important for coffee businesses. However, there is a scarcity of research related to this specific area. The notion that customers who have a strong attachment to the coffee shop's brand are more likely to frequent the establishment again needs to be scientifically investigated. Thus, an in-depth literature review analysis was conducted within the realm of self-congruity and customer satisfaction in relation to brand loyalty in coffee shops. Future research directions and potential research framework are proposed for further exploration. The results have significant practical implications for coffee shop owners and marketers, who can utilise them to design effective branding and marketing strategies to enhance consumer loyalty in highly competitive urban marketplaces. This study contributes to the current literature on brand loyalty and its effect on the food and beverage sector, while also emphasising the need for more research in this field.

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1. Introduction

Coffee holds a special place on the global stage. Revered as a beverage that transcends cultures and borders, its popularity is underscored by staggering estimates, indicating a consumption rate that surpasses an astonishing 500 billion cups each year (Felton, 2018; Motoki et al., 2021). This trajectory of coffee appreciation is resolutely upward, as evidenced by the projected consumption of approximately 166.6 million 60-kg bags from 2020 to 2021, marking a substantial rise from the 147 million bags recorded between 2012 and 2013 (Statista, 2022; Vu et al., 2022). Meanwhile, within Malaysia's borders, the coffee industry is undergoing a transformative phase of robust growth as it evolves into an intensely competitive market. The insights of Rahim et al. (2019), as cited in Ramanathan and Ali (2021), reveal a compelling narrative of both domestic and national coffee chains expanding at a notable pace. This expansion is propelled by an upsurge in coffee consumption, a trend particularly pronounced among the millennial demographic. Consequently, this surge has not only elevated the status of coffee but has also acted as a catalyst for the burgeoning popularity of coffee shops throughout the nation. Notably, Malaysia has secured a place among the top 50 coffee-consuming countries worldwide, a testament to its growing coffee culture (Rahim et al., 2019, as cited in Ramanathan & Ali, 2021). In step with these evolving dynamics, the prescient analysis of the World Coffee Portal (2023) forecasts a captivating trajectory for Malaysia's branded coffee shop market, predicting that by the year 2025, the industry will encompass a remarkable network of over 2,775 outlets. This upward trajectory is perfectly aligned with the bustling contemporary lifestyle of Malaysians, where coffee is swiftly emerging as a beverage of choice to invigorate and refresh amidst the demands of modernity (Khandaker et al., 2020).

The aforesaid findings underscore a paramount imperative for the management and proprietors of coffee shops. It becomes evident that their concerted efforts should be directed towards implementing comprehensive and well-crafted strategies. The overarching goal is to fortify and amplify brand loyalty, a strategic manoeuvre aimed at not only enticing, but also nurturing a recurrent customer base (Jeon & Jo, 2011; Lee & Yeu, 2010; Shin et al., 2012; Yu & Fang, 2009; Suhud et al., 2021). During the fierce and unrelenting competition that characterises the landscape of coffee establishments, the role of brand loyalty takes centre stage. In this contemporary and dynamically evolving market arena, it has metamorphosed into a cardinal factor that holds the key to the sustained prosperity of every coffee enterprise. Delving into the depths of this significance, the pivotal research conducted by Pesoa et al. (2020) casts a spotlight on the profound impact of customer satisfaction. As a driving force, customer satisfaction exerts direct influence while simultaneously serving as a pivotal mediator for an array of other variables that collectively influence the realm of customer loyalty. In this intricate web of relationships, Pesoa et al. (2020) further emphasise the multifaceted nature of customer satisfaction. It emerges as a multifunctional conduit that can be nurtured through a diverse range of strategic approaches. Among these are the meticulous provisioning of exceptional and personalised services, the relentless pursuit of products marked by uncompromising quality, and the judicious alignment of pricing strategies to remain inherently competitive within the predetermined benchmarks.

Furthermore, in the study conducted by Suhud et al. (2021), they suggest that businesses need to not only recognise, but also deeply understand the important role of self-congruity in building and maintaining customer loyalty to their brand. This guidance highlights how important it is for them to adjust their plans based on how customers think and feel about their brand. The idea of self-congruity, which experts like Sirgy et al. (1997) and Li et al. (2022) have explained, suggests that how customers act is closely connected to how well a product matches their sense of self.

This involves a thoughtful comparison that happens in customers' mind, where the similarity between what a product stands for and how the customers see themselves plays a big part in their choices and loyalty.

Adding more depth to this perspective, Kang et al. (2012), as cited in Li et al. (2022), contribute an additional valuable insight. Their research emphasises the positive link between self-congruity and customer loyalty, particularly in the context of coffee shop brands. This assertion highlights the significance of a customer's self-identity aligning with the values and identity represented by a coffee shop brand. This alignment creates a sense of resonance and harmony, nurturing a strong connection between the customer and the brand. Central to this concept is the intricate idea of self-congruity, which examines the nuanced relationship between a product's image and an individual's self-perception. As theorised by Sirgy (1985) and further explored by Joo et al. (2020), self-congruity is a multifaceted concept. It encompasses how well a customer's self-identity and emotions match with the imagery, values, and aspirational identity linked to a product or brand. In the context of coffee shops, this implies that a customer's preference for a specific brand depends on how well the brand's image resonates with their own self-concept. Suhud et al. (2021) further emphasise the crucial role of self-congruity in shaping customer loyalty within the realm of coffee shop brands. By embracing the principles of self-congruity theory and acknowledging its profound impact on customer behaviour, coffee establishments can strategically shape their branding efforts to align with customers' self-perceptions. In doing so, they can establish enduring connections that go beyond mere transactions. Recognising the interplay between self-congruity and customer loyalty offers coffee shops an opportunity to create more meaningful and lasting relationships with their customers.

Taking a closer look at the connection between self-congruity and coffee consumption, there is an intriguing potential relationship that can significantly impact customers' choices and satisfaction when it comes to coffee shops. Surprisingly, this area has not been extensively studied even though there seems to be a strong connection between the concept of coffee shops and individuals' lifestyles. Exploring how self-congruity affects coffee shop choices and consumption patterns can uncover valuable insights for both coffee shop owners and marketers. By understanding this relationship better, businesses can tailor their offerings and experiences to resonate with specific target audiences, thereby potentially boosting customer loyalty and engagement.

The study proposes integrating the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) model as the guiding framework to examine and analyse the impact of self-congruity and overall satisfaction on brand loyalty in urban coffee shops in Malaysia. This theoretical framework brings together the relevant factors that previous scholars have scarcely used in the local context. Revilla-Camacho et al. (2017) explain the ECSI model to understand how different aspects are related to each other. It focuses on seven key concepts: the brand's image, customer expectations, perceptions of product quality, perceptions of service quality, perceived value of the product, overall customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. The main concept of the ECSI model is that happy customers are more likely to stay loyal to a brand. Bertaccini et al. (2021) also suggest that the ECSI model helps us see the connections between different factors. It investigates why things happen and how they lead to specific outcomes. The ECSI model aids our understanding of the various factors influencing brand loyalty.

Additionally, the focal demographic encompassing the scope of this investigation pertains to customers frequenting coffee shops within urban settings. The forthcoming study intends to adopt a methodology grounded in questionnaires as the primary means of data collection. Questionnaires offer a structured and standardised avenue for procuring data, characterised by methodically crafted inquiries that are predetermined, thereby ensuring a consistent approach to information acquisition. This uniformity in data collection methodology subsequently facilitates the seamless contrast and analysis of responses across diverse samples, thereby enabling robust comparative and analytical assessments.

The findings of this study carry significant implications that hold the potential to provide valuable conceptual insights to business proprietors who maintain a steadfast dedication to not only enhancing but also fortifying brand loyalty. By leveraging the optimisation of their product offerings, these entrepreneurs can tap into the reservoir of knowledge generated by this research. The empirical revelations extracted from the study's rigorous investigation are positioned to serve as a cornerstone for shaping strategic decisions with a primary focus on nurturing and cultivating customer allegiance. In this intricate landscape of brand-customer dynamics, the study's revelations offer a strategic roadmap for businesses to navigate their way towards heightened customer loyalty. The insights garnered from empirical analysis can serve as a compass for entrepreneurs seeking to forge stronger connections with their customer base. By understanding the factors that drive customer allegiance, businesses can strategically tailor their approaches, aligning their offerings with the preferences and expectations of their target audience.

Furthermore, the study's outcomes can potentially act as a catalyst for transformative advancements in business performance. Armed with a deeper comprehension of the underpinnings of brand loyalty, business proprietors can make informed decisions that resonate with their customer base, thereby fostering sustainable growth and market expansion. The empirical insights not only shed light on the intricate interplay between product quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty, but also empower businesses to recalibrate their strategies for optimal outcomes. By incorporating the empirical revelations into their operational frameworks, businesses can potentially achieve heightened brand engagement. In an era characterised by intense competition and ever-evolving customer preferences, establishing a meaningful and lasting connection with customers is paramount. The study's findings can guide businesses in tailoring their communication strategies, ensuring that they resonate with their target audience on a deeper level. This, in turn, can lead to increased brand engagement, as customers feel a stronger affinity towards brands that understand and fulfil their needs.

2. Literature Review

Coffee Shop

A coffee shop typically offers a selection of coffee and tea beverages, and even light snacks within a laid-back and comfortable ambience (Bernarto, 2020). Diverging from conventional food and beverage establishments such as restaurants, coffee shops assume a distinct significance for their customers, and scholarly discourse highlights that customers perceive coffee shops as versatile spaces with multifaceted roles (Lee et al., 2018; Aprilia & Suryani, 2020). These establishments transcend mere gastronomic experiences; they capture a sense of purposeful versatility. Coffee shops emerge as locales for obtaining coffee or engaging in social interactions, providing not only to adults but also resonating profoundly with the millennial demographic (Hidayah, 2018; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). The ubiquity of coffee shop visits remains conspicuous, bolstered by statistical evidence underscoring the continued expansion and success of coffee shop establishments (Han et al., 2018; Jang, 2021; Hwang et al., 2021). Indeed, Tarigan et al. (2020) converge in their perspective, concurring that the contemporary surge in coffee shop visitation has catalysed the burgeoning growth within the coffee shop industry. This confluence of viewpoints echoes the evolving societal role of coffee shops as multifunctional spaces that cater to diverse needs and preferences, contributing to their sustained popularity and flourishing business pathways.

Moreover, as highlighted by Litya (2018), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), the act of consuming coffee has transcended its traditional boundaries and evolved into a prevalent trend embraced across all strata of society. This trend has fuelled a continuous influx of franchise suppliers establishing new outlets, while the coffee shop industry has also seen an influx of independent operators, facilitated by relatively low entry barriers (Lee et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). The landscape of coffee consumption has witnessed a surge in new coffee shop establishments, and this proliferation has engendered a sense of competition within the coffee industry, a notion articulated by Ron Prasetyo, a coffee shop business consultant (Mutiah, 2018; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). In the current milieu, the contemporary coffee shop experience has evolved to encompass a competitive dimension, as each establishment endeavours to capture the affections of its customers through compelling and enticing offerings (Tarigan et al., 2020). This narrative aligns with the sentiments echoed by Kim et al. (2016), as cited in Pesoa et al. (2020), who concur that the coffee shop domain is rapidly expanding its market share by drawing in new customers while simultaneously attracting patrons away from rival competitors. This dynamic shift signifies the evolving nature of the coffee shop industry, characterised by fierce competition and a concerted drive to curate captivating experiences that resonate deeply with the customer base.

Coffee Shop Industry in Malaysia

As reported by Statista in 2023, the collective sum of coffee shops and bars within Malaysia has reached an approximate tally of 4.78 thousand, representing a modest increase from the roughly 4.51 thousand establishments recorded in the preceding year. Forecasts indicate a prospective surge in the tally of coffee shops and bars across Malaysia, with projections estimating the count to climb to approximately 5.54 thousand by the year 2026. The trajectory of coffee consumption reflects a global trend, and Malaysia is no exception; coffee has solidified its position as a sought-after beverage for social gatherings and professional meetings, leading to the establishment of a diverse array of coffeehouses within the nation's borders (Khandaker et al., 2020). Recent surveys indicate that the average Malaysian individual consumes an average of 2.38 cups of coffee daily. This heightened coffee consumption can be attributed in part to the widespread global reach of iconic brands such as Starbucks, which has played a pivotal role in introducing Western coffee shop culture to Malaysia and beyond (Corporate Coffee Solutions, 2023). Echoing this sentiment, Mohamud et al. (2017) affirm that contemporary coffee shops are ubiquitous, spanning various locations including shopping malls and convenience stores, serving as inviting spaces for individuals to unwind and enjoy moments of leisure. Drawing from an article by Statista in 2022, it is noted that the revenue generated within Malaysia's coffee market has surged to RM957.80 million in 2023, signalling robust growth. Furthermore, the market is poised to sustain a steady annual expansion rate of 4.21% (CAGR 2023-2028), as outlined in the same source. This economic trajectory underscores the escalating demand for coffee and its associated establishments within the Malaysian market, indicative of a thriving industry landscape poised for continued prosperity.

The Underpinning Theories and Study Models

i. European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) Model

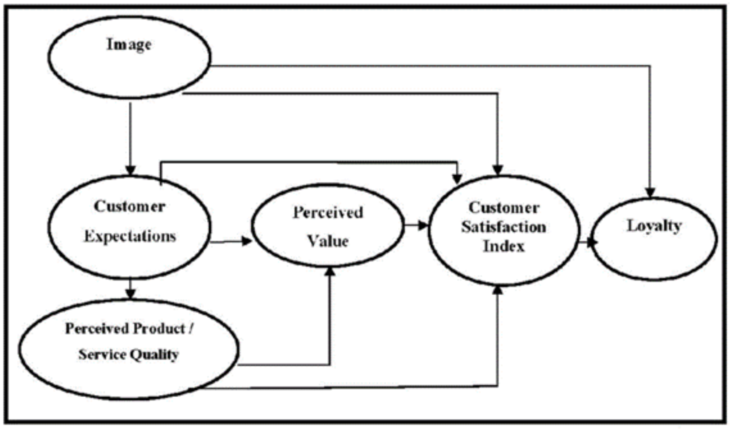
Image
Customer Expectations
Perceived Value
Customer Satisfaction Index
Loyalty
Perceived Product / Service Quality

Figure 1 ECSI Model

The European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) model constitutes a methodological approach aimed at appraising the quality of services dispensed by entities, both within the public and private sectors (Johnson et al., 2001; Revilla-Camacho et al., 2017). This study encompasses multinational corporations operating across the European and Malaysian spheres. By employing the ECSI model, a coherent and uniform yardstick is established to evaluate customer satisfaction and brand loyalty consistently across diverse geographical regions. The ECSI methodology has been meticulously crafted by European experts and is anchored in a predefined set of requisites (ECSI Technical Committee, 1998; Revilla-Camacho et al., 2017). When applied within the Malaysian research context, the European Customer Satisfaction Index furnishes a structured and standardised framework, facilitating the quantification of customer contentment while concurrently facilitating comparisons with European markets. The foundational formulation of the ECSI model, as elucidated by its progenitor Fornell (1992) and extended by Bertaccini et al. (2021), undertakes the assessment of service or product quality from the vantage point of customer experiences. This perspective engenders a comprehensive evaluation that encapsulates the entirety of the purchase and consumption journey within a business environment, thus providing a holistic depiction of the market's dynamics. This model studies the relations of seven constructs: image, expectations, the product’s perceived quality, the service’s perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. The ECSI model’s most important conclusions are that it offers a good structure to explain satisfaction and that including the two previously explained elements of quality can have different influences, depending on the area of application. The ECSI is based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which is a well-established and widely recognised model for measuring customer satisfaction.

The enduring strength and dependability of the ACSI framework have been substantiated over the course of time, thereby establishing the ECSI as a commendable and trustworthy model for this research. As affirmed by Morgeson et al. (2023), the ACSI dataset serves as a repository of dependable and actionable insights into the way customers assess and perceive their interactions with diverse brands and retailers. Within this dataset, an array of factors such as customers' expectations, quality perceptions, perceived value, overall contentment, complaint behaviour, and loyalty are meticulously examined, along with their associated implications. Notably, the linchpin of this model is customer loyalty, a parameter that not only serves as a surrogate indicator for profitability, but also plays an instrumental role in fostering enduring brand allegiance.

ii. Self-Congruity Theory

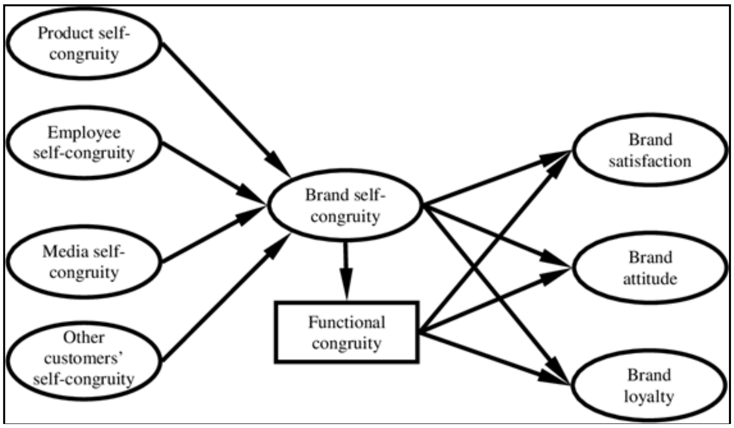

Figure 2 Self-Congruity Theory

The concept of "self-congruity" was introduced by psychologist John J. Sirgy in 1980 to encapsulate the degree of alignment between an individual's perception of a specific brand or product and their own self-image. As outlined by self-congruity theory, when a customer's perception of a brand closely mirrors their self-concept, a pronounced preference for that brand tends to emerge (Swann et al., 1992; Boksberger et al., 2011). This propensity is rooted in the notion that the symbolic attributes of the brand serve to reinforce and validate the customer's personal identity. Within the framework of self-congruity theory, brands become vehicles through which customers express themselves, accentuate specific facets of their identity, signify status, or establish a sense of affiliation with a particular group (Aaker, 1999; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy et al., 2008; Zhu et al., 2019). Leveraging brand endorsers typically yields a significantly substantial impact on customers' attitudes towards the brand. This phenomenon underscores the influential role of individuals who align with the brand's image in shaping customer perceptions and attitudes.

Perceived Product Quality

According to the research carried out by Ma et al. (2010), as cited in Abdul Majid et al. (2018), the paramount importance of product quality is underscored in contrast to other factors like the environment and service attributes. This accentuates the pivotal role of perceived product quality across various food and beverage establishments. Notably, millennials exhibit a heightened discernment when it comes to the coffee they consume, displaying a willingness to invest in high-quality offerings (Ramanathan & Ali, 2021). Conversely, Chebat and Michon (2003), as cited in Li et al. (2022), present a contrasting viewpoint by asserting that customers' perceptions of product quality are positively correlated with the atmospheric qualities of the establishment. Additionally, Ha and Jang (2010), as cited in Abdul Majid et al. (2018), unequivocally emphasise the significance of product quality as a crucial determinant of customer loyalty. They concur that it holds a positive association with fostering customer allegiance. This convergence of insights underscores the multifaceted interplay between product quality, ambience, and customer loyalty within the dynamic landscape of food and beverage establishments.

Furthermore, Tarigan et al. (2020) contend that the consideration of high-quality coffee significantly influences customers when choosing a coffee shop to patronise. Within the service industry, perceived quality is distinctly characterised as the "overall evaluation of a specific service firm resulting from a comparative assessment of its performance against the customer's general expectations of industry performance" (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Han et al., 2018). Intrinsic to this, a preferred brand must offer distinct values or advantages in its products or services (Sethuraman, 2000; Li et al., 2022). Taylor and Hunter (2002), as cited in Han et al. (2018), hypothesise that a heightened perception of quality yields positive outcomes including enhanced customer satisfaction, favourable marketing outcomes, and customer loyalty manifesting as repeated purchases or favourable word-of-mouth endorsements. Consequently, the identification of pivotal elements, such as perceived product quality, that govern brand loyalty within the realm of coffee shop brands is held as a critical effort. Recognising and nurturing this quality-based connection between customer perception and brand allegiance is pivotal in the context of coffee shop establishments.

Hence, it becomes imperative that the chosen coffee brand offers distinctive values or benefits in its products, while the inherent quality of the coffee itself should serve to reinforce the alignment between the coffee shop and the customer's self-image (Li et al., 2022). In the pursuit of outshining the competition and drawing an increased number of patrons to their establishments, coffee shop managers and proprietors invariably focus on enhancing various facets, with product quality occupying a pivotal role. It's worth noting that not all visitors to coffee shops are necessarily fervent coffee enthusiasts, yet the quality of coffee remains a prime criterion in their selection process. This fact becomes apparent from the data provided by Suhud et al. (2021), where approximately 30% of participants pointed out Starbucks as their most frequently patronised coffee establishment. This underscores the potency of product quality as a decisive factor in shaping customer preferences and driving their continued engagement.

Perceived Service Quality

Service quality is characterised as the differential between the anticipations held by customers and the actual service they receive from an organisation (Setiawan & Sayuti, 2017; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). O'Cass and Grace (2008), as cited in Li et al. (2022), illustrate that customers perceive a service as being more valuable when the brand's image aligns with their self-perception. When it comes to selecting a coffee shop, customers are inclined to opt for those that offer an array of captivating and gratifying services as articulated by Tarigan et al. (2020). The evaluation of service quality, as posited by Jiang and Wang (2006), as cited in Han et al. (2018), hinges on the degree of contentment derived from the service interaction. They further underscore that, in contrast to tangible products, services are both generated and consumed concurrently, with the participation of both the customer and the service provider. This dynamic underscore the distinctive nature of service encounters, wherein customer experience is shaped by an interplay of personal interaction and service provision.

Furthermore, in the race to outshine competitors and entice a greater influx of customers to their establishments, coffee shop management and owners strategically focus on enhancing a multitude of factors, encompassing elements like product quality, service quality, perceived value, and pricing strategies (Suhud et al., 2021). Numerous empirical inquiries underscore the positive correlation between improved service quality and heightened customer loyalty, underscoring the pivotal role of service quality in shaping customer allegiance (Carranza et al., 2018; Mhlanga, 2018; Hyun, 2010). Considering this, the identification of critical components, such as perceived service quality, in delineating brand loyalty within the realm of coffee shop establishments is considered paramount. Substantiating this, it is established that affirmative emotions, including overall customer satisfaction, are outcomes triggered by stimuli linked to service quality, with perceived service quality serving as a precursor to eliciting customer emotional responses (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Han et al., 2018). This insight underscores the intricate interplay between service quality, customer emotions, and the establishment of lasting brand loyalty within the context of coffee shop brands.

Perceived Price Value

Price value can be defined as the customer's assessment of whether the price assigned to a product is reasonable, a factor acknowledged as pivotal within marketing that holds the potential to sway customer behaviour (Jin et al., 2016; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). In a similar vein, Aprilia and Suryani (2020) expound that positive inclinations toward behaviour encompass intentions to recommend, revisit, and accept a potentially higher price. Meanwhile, Abdullah et al. (2018), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), elucidate the notion of a "fair price" as a cost for a product that customers perceive as fitting and equitable. They further underscore that instances of unjust pricing can evoke negative customer emotions, including sentiments of anger. Furthermore, customers are inclined to assess the fairness of prices relative to competitors, a facet that can significantly influence their purchasing decisions (Bassey, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2023). The perception of price fairness has the capacity to bolster customer satisfaction and loyalty, as individuals are more likely to engage with businesses where they believe prices are equitable. Hanaysha (2016), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), reinforces this notion by emphasising that perceptions of price fairness substantially shape customer responses concerning pricing-related decisions. These dynamic underscores the profound influence of perceived price equity on customer reactions and subsequent behavioural choices.

In addition, as referenced by Githiri (2018), and cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), brands often strategise to allocate their profits according to the pricing of their products or services. This is driven by the customer inclination to seek products that offer optimal value for the most economical price. The contention extends to the notion that gauging price fairness hinges on aspects such as the perceived value in relation to portion sizes of food and beverages, as well as a competitive price relative to peers in the market. The role of price perception goes beyond being a mere factor; it operates as a moderator within the intricate process of generating customer satisfaction (Tarigan et al., 2020). Consequently, the identification of pivotal components, including perceived price value, in shaping brand loyalty within the realm of coffee shop brands is underscored as a crucial endeavour. This understanding highlights the potency of pricing perceptions in influencing customer experiences and, by extension, fostering enduring brand allegiance within the competitive landscape of coffee shop establishments.

Brand Image

According to Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), as cited in Han et al. (2018), brand image is construed as the encapsulation of a brand's essence within a customer's psyche, encompassing a spectrum of perceptions, whether objective or subjective. O'Cass and Grace (2008), as cited in Li et al. (2022), highlight the phenomenon wherein customers perceive heightened value in services when the brand's image aligns with their self-concept. This alignment fosters an amplified emotional bond between customers and the brand (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Oliver, 1999; Li et al., 2022). The concept of an image, akin to the process of symbolising the impressions of objects ingrained in human associative memory, operates as a representation of consumption's significance, encapsulating attributes of self-expression (Paivio, 1969; Lau & Phau, 2007; Song et al., 2019). The notion is extended by Engel et al. (1993), as cited in Song et al. (2019), who categorise brand image as an amalgamation of customers' intangible and tangible perceptions, or connections, to a brand, formed through cognitive, emotional, and evaluative cognitive processes. This comprehensive understanding of brand image underscores its multifaceted role in shaping customer perceptions and affiliations with brands, culminating in a complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions.

Likewise, as asserted by Han et al. (2018), customers construct a brand image through their interaction with various facets of a firm, with their perceptions stemming largely from their encounters, where the quality of services or products emerges as a predominant phenomenon within their experiences. In this context, service or product quality takes on a paramount role as it profoundly shapes the brand's image. Consequently, the image can exert an influence on customers through multiple channels, including advertising, word-of-mouth, public relations, physical appearance, and tangible experiences (Normann, 1991; Abdul Majid et al., 2018). The quality of services or products forms the bedrock of a brand's image, a notion supported by Keller (2009), as cited in Song et al. (2019), who contends that brand image constitutes a collection of a customer's beliefs, ideas, and impressions about a brand. Therefore, customers' behaviours and attitudes towards a brand are inherently linked to their perception of the brand's image. This accentuates the imperative of recognising the pivotal role of brand image in shaping brand loyalty within the context of coffee shop brands. Moreover, as highlighted by Gul (2014), a highly esteemed brand name for a coffee shop significantly impacts the preservation of elevated levels of customer satisfaction, as it reflects how customers perceive the company. Consequently, the brand's reputation can influence the degree of satisfaction customers experience. Based on the research by Aryani et al. (2021), Starbucks employs price increases as a strategy to set itself apart and bolster the premium image of its brand and products. Furthermore, Starbucks strategically situates its outlets in urban centres, aligning with its target customer base. This urban-centric location strategy caters to middle and upper-class populations. The culmination of these Starbucks strategies leads to a positive brand image, as corroborated by the data collected from customers.

Self-Congruity

In accordance with Sirgy (1985), as cited in Joo et al. (2020), the concept of actual self-congruity underscores the alignment between an individual's perception of a product and their true self. Rooted in the self-congruity theory, it is posited that "customer behaviour is influenced, in part, by the alignment resulting from a psychological comparison between the product-user image and the customer's self-concept" (Sirgy et al., 1997; Li et al., 2022). Customers engage in the consumption of brands or products to nurture and enhance their self-concept (McCracken, 1986; Sirgy, 1982; Zinkhan & Hong, 1991; Li et al., 2022). Numerous studies have illustrated that brand loyalty can be shaped by various factors, prominently including self-congruity (Suhud et al., 2021). Kang et al. (2012), as cited in Li et al. (2022), offer evidence that the congruence between a coffee shop brand and customers' self-image positively impacts both cognitive and affective loyalty. This notion encompasses diverse facets of self-congruity, encompassing actual self-congruity, social self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Li et al., 2022). Notably, self-congruity has been revealed as a positive influence on customer perceptions of service quality at large, underscoring the cognitive rapport established between customers and products that substantially shapes their quality perceptions (Quester et al., 2000; Das, 2015; Shamah et al., 2018). This interplay further accentuates the interwoven nature of self-congruity and its cascading effects on customer perception and loyalty.

Contrariwise, self-image congruity is also characterised as "the alignment between the product's value-expressive attributes (product-user image) and the audience's self-concept" (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Suhud et al., 2021). They further contend that a constructive and noteworthy connection prevails between self-congruity and brand loyalty. Embedded within social psychology, the self-concept theory posits that customers' personalities are discernible through the products, brands, and services they select (Ross, 1971; Shamah et al., 2018). Follow-up investigations have expounded on how self-congruity encompasses an individual's perception of products, services, brands, or destinations in terms of functional and psychological attributes (Han et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2020; Kim & Thapa, 2018; Li et al., 2021). In the realm of tourism research, self-congruity is delineated as the alignment between a tourist's self-concept and the perceived image of a specific product (Kerstetter et al., 2005; Li et al., 2021). In harmony with the theory of person-environment fit, individuals possessing a heightened degree of self-congruity tend to amplify the interplay between their motivation and experiential value, alongside the interplay between emotion and experiential value (Shamah et al., 2018). This notion underscores the intricate connections between self-congruity and customer motivation, emotional response, and experiential value, thereby highlighting its significance in shaping customer perceptions and experiences.

Self-congruity within the context of coffee shop brands embodies a phenomenon where the image of a coffee product, service, or brand aligns progressively with the self-concept of customers. This phenomenon exerts a pervasive influence on the perceptions of various stimuli encapsulated within the coffee shop environment. Notably, customers exhibit a proclivity to derive greater enjoyment from a coffee shop brand and consequently become more frequent patrons when they perceive a heightened level of self-congruity with the coffee shop's essence (Liu et al., 2012; Anjani & Dewi, 2021). The discernment of a heightened degree of self-congruity is intrinsically tied to the cultivation of more favourable attitudes, which, in a reciprocal manner, engenders a deeper sense of loyalty among customers. This linkage underscores the pivotal role that self-congruity plays in forging positive customer attitudes, thereby fostering heightened brand loyalty within the realm of coffee shop establishments.

Overall Satisfaction

In essence, overall customer satisfaction is the positive evaluation derived by customers from the product and service offerings they receive (Carranza et al., 2018; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). Song et al. (2019) expands on this notion by interpreting satisfaction as the emotional response elicited by a customer's purchasing encounter, and further postulate that brand loyalty materialises as an outcome of this satisfaction, particularly within the context of established coffee shop brands. The commitment of customers to a coffee brand often stems from its ability to deliver superior functional advantages relative to its competitors, such as the perceived highest quality of coffee or customer service. This allegiance gradually fosters a lasting relationship that encourages customers to consistently patronise and repurchase the brand's products and services (Han et al., 2018). Saulina and Syah (2018), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), characterise satisfaction as the emotional state resulting from the comparison between the product a customer receives and their initial expectations. This dynamic interplay between expectations and actual experiences is pivotal in shaping customers' contentment or dissatisfaction.

Additionally, as per Mensah and Mensah (2018), cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), customer satisfaction can be construed as the evaluation of a product or service from the customer's standpoint, gauging the level of satisfaction derived from its consumption. This evaluation can be quantified by discerning the differential between customer expectations and the actual performance they receive. Moreover, the effectiveness of products and services in elevating customer satisfaction while averting dissatisfaction plays a crucial role in its determination (Hanaysha, 2016, as cited in Dhisasmito et al., 2020). In the service industry, particularly, it holds significant importance, yielding positive implications for businesses (Lee et al., 2018, as cited in Dhisasmito et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction can be approached either from the perspective of transaction-specific contentment or cumulative contentment (Tu et al., 2012; Han et al., 2018). Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011), as cited in Han et al. (2018), refer to the latter as cumulative satisfaction, portraying it as the customer's ultimate assessment stemming from their comprehensive experience with a particular brand, product, or service. On the other hand, Keshavarz et al. (2016), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), define satisfaction as the fulfilment-oriented response of the customer, encapsulating their overall contentment in relation to the product or service received.

Brand Loyalty

The research conducted by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), as cited in Suhud et al. (2021), stands as a seminal and extensively cited contribution within the realm of brand loyalty. This work delves into the multiple facets of brand loyalty, addressing two distinct manifestations: attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. Within the framework of this study, companies typically aspire to cultivate a sense of loyalty among their customer base, aiming for a scenario where a substantial portion of their customers consistently chooses their brand for purchases and utilisation of offered products and services. Githiri's insights (2018), as cited in Dhisasmito et al. (2020), underscore the association between customer loyalty and specific behaviours, notably the recurrence of purchases and the advocacy of products or services to others. This form of loyalty is characterised by repeat interactions and endorsements that are reflective of a positive affinity towards the brand. Conversely, brand loyalty is entrenched in the concept of consistent purchasing behaviour demonstrated by customers over time, encompassing an intrinsically favourable emotional, evaluative, and behavioural inclination towards brands, labels, graded substitutes, or product choices. This notion is buttressed by the work of scholars such as Oliver (1999) and Song et al. (2019), highlighting the profound interconnection between the psychological and transactional dimensions of customer-brand relationships.

Consequently, loyal patrons exhibit a propensity for more frequent and substantial purchases, serve as magnets for new customers, foster a positive reputation, generate favourable word-of-mouth endorsements, and exhibit resilience against the allure of competing alternatives (Han et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). The concept of brand loyalty is widely construed as a predisposed behavioural reaction, reflected over a span of time, by a discerning decision-making entity towards one or more brands from a collection of alternatives, all influenced by intricate psychological processes (Jacoby, 1971; Han et al., 2018). Extensive research conducted by Hwang and Lee (2018), Ko and Chiu (2008), Rizvi et al. (2020), and Hwang et al. (2021) underscores the forward-looking nature of brand loyalty. This construct emerges as a paramount indicator of a firm's triumph within a fiercely competitive market landscape, compelling a substantial allocation of resources and attention towards the comprehensive investigation of pivotal factors that meld brand loyalty within diverse contextual domains. According to Nawaz and Usman (2011), as cited in Han et al. (2018), organisations that amass a substantial base of loyal customers are poised to reap manifold benefits, including augmented market shares, heightened return on investment, fortified bargaining power vis-à-vis suppliers and distribution channels, and the propagation of positive word-of-mouth endorsements. Within the coffee shop industry, the discourse on brand loyalty has garnered substantial attention from scholars. A consensus has been reached that sustaining and enhancing brand offerings to cater to customer satisfaction is an instrumental avenue to engender brand loyalty. Song et al. (2019) posits that pivotal to the foundation of brand loyalty in coffee shops, lies an unwavering focus on customer satisfaction. Accordingly, managers and practitioners should continuously discern individual customer preferences and attributes to effectually gratify their patrons.

Proposed Conceptual Framework and Arguments

Drawing upon existing arguments and analysis of relevant literature, it becomes increasingly evident that a noteworthy and compelling nexus exists between the concepts of self-congruity, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. The intricate interplay between these constructs not only underscores their individual significance, but also highlights the need for their intricate connections to be meticulously scrutinised in forthcoming research endeavours. Therefore, considering the nuanced insights garnered from prior discussions, it is imperative to propose a meticulously crafted research model that aims to unravel the multifaceted relationships existing within this triad of self-congruity, satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

The significance of self-congruity, wherein individuals perceive a harmony between their self-image and the attributes of a brand, emerges as a pivotal factor in influencing customer behaviour and attitude formation. Concurrently, satisfaction serves as a pivotal checkpoint in the customer journey, representing the culmination of expectations and actual experiences. Building on these foundations, brand loyalty emerges as a crucial outcome, manifesting the enduring allegiance and preference exhibited by customers towards a particular brand.

The proposed research model, stemming from the extensive synthesis of prior arguments, posits that the interdependence of self-congruity, satisfaction, and brand loyalty yields a dynamic and reciprocal relationship that merits meticulous investigation. This model underscores the potential mediating role of satisfaction in bridging the gap between self-congruity and brand loyalty, thereby providing a comprehensive lens through which the intricate mechanisms underpinning these constructs can be comprehended.

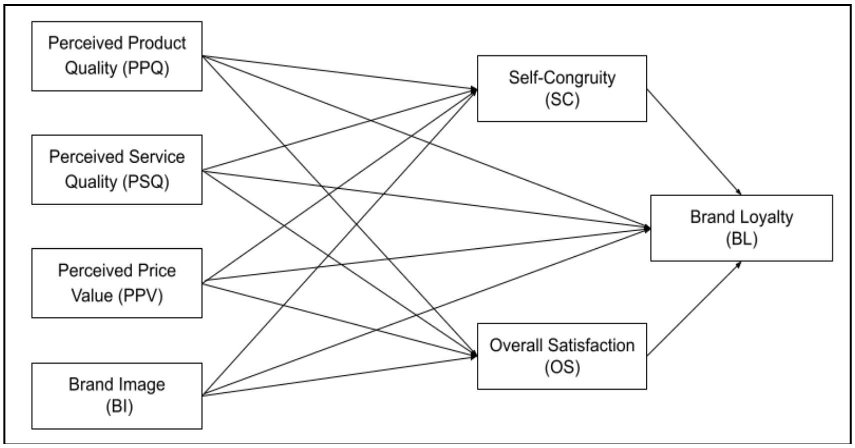
Perceived Product Quality (PPQ)
Perceived Service Quality (PSQ)
Perceived Price Value (PPV)
Brand Image (BI)
Self-Congruity (SC)
Overall Satisfaction (OS)
Brand Loyalty (BL)

Figure 3 Conceptual Framework

3. Proposed Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the potential causal relationship that exists between customer satisfaction, self-congruity, and brand loyalty within the customer base of coffee shops. The study proposes utilising a causal research approach to establish more robust and definitive conclusions regarding the cause-and-effect associations linking variables such as product quality, service quality, price value, and brand image with the overarching construct of brand loyalty. By adopting this approach, the research seeks to unravel the intricate mechanisms that underpin the interactions and influences shaping the phenomena of interest, thereby enhancing our comprehension of these underlying forces.

The study also proposes the adoption of a cross-sectional approach, involving the gathering of data from participants at a single point in time. This method enables the collection of data from participants with diverse demographics, helping to capture the current conditions and attitudes towards coffee shop brand preferences. The study is proposed to take place in a non-contrived setting, reflecting a natural environment without any artificial manipulation. The data will be collected through surveys administered to real customers of coffee shops in Malaysia. This approach aims to quantify the influence of different factors on customer loyalty in coffee shop settings and provide practical insights for enhancing brand loyalty.

Furthermore, sampling plays a pivotal role in ensuring the accuracy of data collection and effectively defining the study's target population. As outlined by Singh and Masuku (2014), sampling involves the deliberate selection of a subset of individuals from a larger population to draw inferences about the entire group's characteristics. In this research, the study proposes the utilisation of purposive sampling technique, a form of non-probability sampling. This choice is predicated on the presence of an inaccessible sampling frame concerning the numbers of coffee shop customers. Purposive sampling is a research strategy that intentionally selects specific locations, individuals, or events to address gaps in knowledge that might otherwise remain unexplored (Maxwell, 1996; Taherdoost, 2018). Instances or individuals are included in the sample when the researcher deems their presence necessary to fulfil the study's objectives.

The implementation of purposive sampling in this research facilitated the gathering of pertinent information to evaluate a specific target group even though it involves a non-probability sampling approach where different segments of the population do not have equal probabilities of being selected as research subjects. Given the research objectives and the absence of specific population figures or limitations in accessing a sample frame, the suitability of purposive sampling for this study becomes evident (Etikan & Babatope, 2019; Levy & Lemeshow, 1999; Smith & Dawber, 2019).

To comprehensively address the research objectives, the survey questionnaire will incorporate a blend of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. Participants will be requested to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a scale in response to various statements related to the antecedents and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the questionnaire will include demographic inquiries aimed at capturing the participants' characteristics and preferences.

4. Conclusion

This conceptual study embarked on a compelling investigation into an unexplored avenue: the intricate connection between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty within the coffee shop industry. Central to this exploration were the mediating roles of self-congruence and overall contentment. The significance of maintaining customer loyalty is underscored by the current surge in coffee shop demand worldwide. A robust brand connection propels customers to frequent an establishment more regularly, champion it among peers, and spread positive word-of-mouth endorsements. To unravel the multifaceted factors shaping customer brand loyalty in coffee shop settings, an exhaustive literature analysis was meticulously undertaken. The findings illuminated a pathway for enhancing brand loyalty, shedding light on the pivotal roles played by customers' self-congruence and holistic satisfaction. These insights resonate profoundly for coffee shop proprietors and marketers, arming them with actionable knowledge to craft branding and marketing strategies that resonate deeply with customers, even within the fiercely competitive urban landscapes. Furthermore, this study underscores the urgency for further exploration into the intricate interplay between brand loyalty and the broader food and beverage industry. By contributing to the existing reservoir of knowledge, it amplifies the call for a deeper understanding of the dynamics that underpin customer choices and behaviours within this evolving landscape. This holistic perspective enriches both academic discourse and practical decision-making, enhancing the industry's resilience and adaptability in an ever-changing market milieu.

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Authors Contributions

Nur Adriana Yusli led this study and wrote the paper; Muhammad Safuan Abdul Latip and Ahmad Esa Abdul Rahman supervised, reviewed, and improved the article.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is associated with this publication.

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