

## The Relationship of Brand Image and Service Quality on Student Loyalty of A University Shop

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### ABSTRACT

*The study aimed is to examine the relationship of brand image and service quality towards student loyalty in purchasing at a university shop, namely UniShop, in the southern state of Malaysia. By understanding student loyalty, the university management might encourage students to shop at the UniShop and generate revenues within the campus. The decreasing sales of UniShop are affected by a hypermarket located within walking distance to the university in August 2017. From the literature, the entrance of multinational companies might affect the small companies surrounding them, including UniShop which is a small enterprise. Thus, the research examined student loyalty in purchasing at UniShop by distributing questionnaires to the students of the university. The researchers used proportionate stratified random sampling to generalize the finding across all semester students in the university. The findings showed that brand image and service quality played an important role in student loyalty. Students were the main customers of a university shop, contributed most of the shop's business sustainability, and generate indirect income to the university. In order to maintain student loyalty, UniShop has to take some initiatives including to increase the scale of products, focuses on student-centered services, improve the shop layout, and sell exclusive university merchandise to increase the student's self-belonging to the university products.*

**Keywords:** brand image, service quality, student loyalty, university shop

### INTRODUCTION

As a developing country, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the engine of national economic growth. Malaysian SME sector contributed to more than 40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 (The Star Online, 2017). Starting from July 2013, the anchor agency for SME in Malaysia, SME Corp defined small and medium enterprises depending on the sales turnover and number of full-time employees. The classification are: 1) for the manufacturing sector, SMEs are firms with sales turnover not exceeding RM50 million or the company with not more than 200 full-time employees; and 2) for the services and other sectors, SMEs are firms with full-time employees not exceeding 75 or sales turnover not exceeding RM20 million (SME Corp, 2016). In 2015, there were 907,065 SMEs operated in Malaysia compared to 638,790 in 2010. Within five years, SMEs has generated almost RM1.0 trillion which increasing by 9.3% from RM644.7 billion in 2010 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016).

University shop is a shop owned by a private entity related to the university and indirectly contributed to the revenue for the university. Normally, the university shop is a registered business entity with Malaysian Registrar of Companies, the agency to cater registration of companies in Malaysia. A university shop is classified as an SME because it has full-time employees not exceeding 75 and the sales turnover below RM20 million.

University shop is important in a university as it helps to supply necessities to students who cannot commute to shop outside the campus. The establishment of the university shop also motivates students to stay in-campus and focuses on their studies. Malaysian Minister of Domestic Trade, Co-operatives and Consumerism (MDTCC), Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob once said, almost all universities in the country have mini-mart or university shops to sell books and other equipment for the students (Utusan Online, 2013). University shop is a mart provided inside of the campus. There are various items and services provided in the mart for students on campus. The items provided are drinks, foods, snacks, stationery, daily products and more whilst for services, such as printing and photocopy. Having mart inside the campus makes it more convenient for students to buy and get their daily necessities. It might be difficult for them to go out from the campus to find hypermarket therefore, these in-campus marts are convenient for them. Generally, every campus in any Malaysian higher institution has its own UniShop, with different names. It can be big or small marts. For example, K-Shoppe at International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), Coop Mart of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), KOOP Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), and Varsity Mall of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) There is no exact number of UniShop registered in Malaysia because their businesses are registered as sole-proprietorship business with Malaysian Registrar of Companies.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In this era of globalization, competition is increasingly sharp for domestic and international market businesses (Setiawan & Devi, 2016). University stores will also compete with multinational companies (MNCs) as some MNCs enter the market near universities and university members will be their new target market. The effect of this overflow is the result of the establishment of a university in certain places and it is very common in many countries of the world (Björgum, 2016). The drastic growth of MNCs in the domestic industry threatens small shops, such as university shops to devise new strategies and attract customer loyalty. Examples of big MNC stores are Tesco, Aeon (formerly known as JUSCO), and [JN1] Giant. According to Ali et al. (2005), almost all foreign-owned hypermarkets offer large amounts of investment to the country and if left uncontrolled, small businesses may incur significant losses and bring them to wind up their businesses. [JN1] Carrefour sold its business in Malaysia to Aeon in 2012.

In a competitive business environment, the brand image of the company is very important for the product or service offered (Puri, 2017). According to Lahap et al. (2015), brand image is essentially, what comes to the mind of the consumer when the brand is placed in front of the customer. Therefore, organizations or companies will work hard to build their brand image. On the other hand, service quality is not only an important factor in customer satisfaction in the manufacturing industry but also in the service firm (Malik, Ghafoor, & Iqbal, 2012). Customer loyalty can be maintained once when the quality service has improved. However, when customers do not get the expected quality of service once they enter the store, their trust declines which in turn leads to dissatisfaction. Hence, they will switch to another store. (Malik, Ghafoor, & Iqbal, 2012).

The alarming issue in this study is when a big MNC store started to operate in August 2017 near University J at southern Malaysia (the real name of the university had to be disguised as to protect its anonymity). The store is located in proximity to the university, which can be reached within walking distance. The university

shop that runs on the campus named UniShop. Starting from August 2017, the sales of the UniShop was going down. Figure 1 shows the graph of monthly sales of UniShop in 2017.

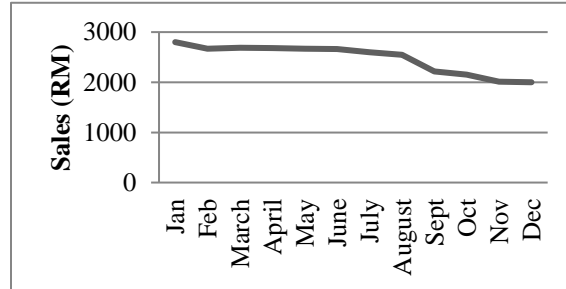


Figure 1: Monthly Sales of UniShop at 2017

Even if it is smaller than the big MNC store, UniShop has its own uniqueness which the former does not have, for example, the printing and photocopy machine. The price of goods at the big MNC store is cheaper but the goods were sold in bulk, which is unnecessary for the students and sometimes they cannot afford to buy the bulky goods.

From the literature review, it is important for a company to retain the customer loyalty in order to sustain their business for longer period. Brand image and service quality are the factors that might affect the customer loyalty (Wu, Liao, Chen & Hsu, 2011; Malik, Ghafoor & Iqbal, 2012). However, there is lack of researches study on both factors on the context of student loyalty, which normally used in studies involved the university or school as the research context (Usman & Mokhtar, 2016).

Thus, the research questions for the study are: 1) to examine the relationship between loyalty and brand image; 2) to examine the relationship between loyalty and service quality; and 3) to identify the most influential factors that effects student loyalty of purchasing at UniShop.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Student Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as the behavior of the customer to repeat purchase in a store or specific brand because of the feature and characteristics of the products. For services, the customer will retain to use the services even though there are other services providers. In higher education, students also have their loyalty to use the facilities provided by the university. Student loyalty can also be referred to as customer loyalty. This is because the entire students registered on campus are the customers of a university. The research focuses on students as the customer, thus, the researchers used the term “student loyalty” (Helgesen & Nasset, 2011).

In general, loyalty can be distinct as the behavior approach includes criteria such as share of wallet, word of mouth referrals, and repeat purchase. Whilst, the attitudinal approach consists of criteria like commitment, trust or emotional attachment (Clotney, Collier, & Stodnick, 2008) that resulted from customers’ beliefs that the quantity of value gained from one supplier is greater than that available from other suppliers (Hallowell, 1996). There is a connection between repeat purchase and loyalty, in that for a customer to be seen as loyal, it may be expected that such customers will continue with the act of buying a market offering repeatedly (Ogba & Tan, 2009). Customers tend to buy again if they satisfy with the products they purchased. Besides, loyal customers tend to make conceivable recommendations to the people around them (Kim et al., 2016).

Customer loyalty is a widely studied construct in marketing research (Makanyeza & Chikazhe, 2017) but less in a higher education context. Student loyalty is becoming increasingly important for institutions that offering higher education. Student loyalty is influenced by increased student mobility, which gives the process of attracting students with a new dimension (Helgesen & Nettet, 2011). Student loyalty is important to the university shop because they gained sales from the transaction of the students. This can be a win-win situation whereby the students get what they need in their daily life; meanwhile, the university shop gets higher profit. Thus, the student loyalty needs to retain so that the university shop can increase their sales.

## **Brand Image**

Brand image is one of the determinants that can influence student loyalty in buying at the university shop. Brand image in this research referred to the image of the shop itself; the image of the shop as a provider to the students as their customers. Brand image in this aspect is the image of the store, how they handle during customers visit, the product and services provided and the perception that will stick in consumer's minds wherever they are. Brand image is very important to consumers and marketing as it acts as an information provider for the people (Chen & Fan, 2017). A very good image will impress the customers. Thus, this will lead to better customer loyalty. According to Yeboah et al. (2016), the brand influences loyalty because people tend to classify themselves into different social categories.

The perceptions of the students towards the store differ according to their experience when buying at the store. Chen and Fan (2017) also added, when some of the elements are in relation with the brand itself, or through words spread among the people about their experiences and expectations about the product, and this kind of situation reflects the brand's reputation or the consumers' impressions about it. This is summing the information that they gained, including experience, word-of-mouth, advertisement, and package, service and so on (Liu, Zhang, & Qin, 2016). In fact, the common notion in the general literature on the image is to allow the corporate image to have a spillover effect on their product brand image (Helgesen & Nettet, 2011). The image of the university shop itself is assumed to have positive effects on students' loyalty. Thus, the higher the brand image perception of the students towards the store, the higher they can contribute to the student's loyalty.

## **Service Quality**

Service quality has been widely acknowledged as an essential issue in many industries as it helps a company improve its profits and also satisfy and retain customers (Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2015). Better service quality provided by the provider will help in the increasing number of sales and profits too. In past decades, there are many measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of service quality of companies, including the five dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. Service quality measure by the research was guided by SERVQUAL framework proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998).

To add the definition of service quality, it is defined as the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for service and their ideas of service performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1998). If a product achieves the customer's expectations, they will be pleased and acknowledge that the product is acceptable or even high quality (Jahanshahi et al., 2011). Among the service sectors, higher education needs a special emphasis on evaluating the issues related to the quality of services and its measurement. It is also very important to measure service (Annamdevula & Bellamkonda, 2014). Annamdevula and Bellamkonda (2014) added that as the researchers recognized the importance of

measuring service quality in higher education, they are still unable to define in common words. Thus, a university shop can survive long through its customer loyalty.

University shops such as UniShop may attract more customers through its service quality because there are other hypermarkets located near the campus. Improved service quality offered by the shop provides them a competitive advantage that leads to increasing number in market share, profit, goodwill, new customers, retention of customers and reduces the market cost through publicity of old customers (Akhtar et al., 2016).

### Theoretical Framework

The framework consists of two main drivers; brand image and service quality. These independent variables affect student loyalty on buying from University J. Figure 2 shows the theoretical framework designed by the researcher derived from the literature review.

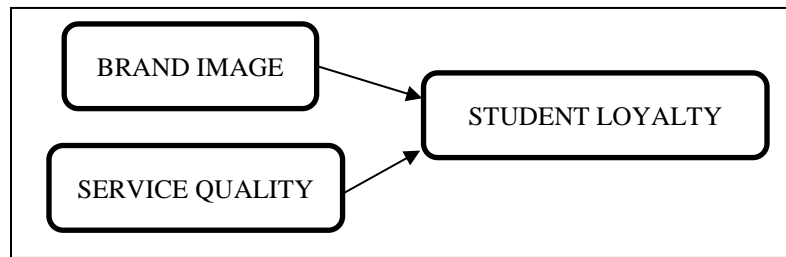


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the study

### METHODOLOGY

The research applied a quantitative research methodology. The researchers distributed a self-administered questionnaire to the University J students in November 2017. The study used proportionate stratified random sampling to select the respondents. The population (N) for the study used is engineering students amounted to 750 students. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample table, from the 750 number of populations, 254 respondents should be selected as the sample. From 750 totals of the students, 34% of the element was needed to get 254 samples. Table 1 shows the number of students that should be selected from each semester. From 254 questionnaires, 163 respondents returned the questionnaire which means the response rate is 65%. The questionnaires were adapted from previous researches and were edited according to the research context. Table 2 shows the sources of the questionnaire for this study.

Table 1: Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling Based on Semester

Semester	Number of elements	Number of subjects in the sample (34% of the elements)
Semester 1	237	80
Semester 2	59	20
Semester 3	226	77
Semester 4	54	18
Semester 5	174	59
Total	<b>750</b>	<b>254</b>

**Table 2: Sources of Questionnaire**

Variable	Item	Sources
Brand Image	4	Liu, Zhang. & Qin (2016) and Lahap et al. (2015)
Service Quality	4	Dabholkar, A.P., Thorpe, D.I., & Rentz, J.O.(1996)
Student Loyalty	4	Bayraktar et al. (2012) and Makenyeza & Chikazhe (2017)
Demographic Profile	6	Designed by researcher

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the study, the researchers analyzed data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (IBM-SPSS v22.0) software to answer the research questions posed in the early part of the study. Table 3 shows the research questions and the analysis needed to answer the research questions to fulfill the research objectives. The researchers ran the reliability test to know whether each item in the variable set is reliable and consistent to gain the goodness of the data. Table 4 shows the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test. The values for all three variables are good and reliable. The frequency distribution of the demographics section for all respondents is shown in Table 5. The sample size for the study is 163 students where 92 of them are female (56.4%) and 71 students are male (43.6%). Table 5 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents according to several aspects; age, study program, current semester, frequency of visiting UniShop, and how much they spent for each visit.

**Table 3: Research Questions and Its Analyses**

Research Question	Analysis
RQ1: To examine the relationship between loyalty and brand image	Pearson Correlation
RQ2: To examine the relationship between loyalty and service quality	Pearson Correlation
RQ3: To identify the most influential factors that effects student loyalty of purchasing at UniShop	Multiple Regression

**Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Brand Image	0.849	4
Service Quality	0.813	4
Student Loyalty	0.878	4

**Table 5: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Age</i>		
18	31	19.0
19	31	19.0
20	53	32.5
21	24	14.7
22	17	10.4
23	3	1.8
24	2	1.2
25	2	1.2
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	71	43.6
Female	92	56.4
<i>Program</i>		
DTC	28	17.2
DTE	16	9.8
DTF	29	17.8
DTG	27	16.6
DTH	29	17.8
DTM	19	11.7
DTV	15	9.2
<i>Semester</i>		
Semester 1	44	27.0
Semester 2	14	8.6
Semester 3	46	28.2
Semester 4	12	7.4
Semester 5	47	28.8
<i>How often buy at UniShop?</i>		
Everyday	82	50.3
Twice a week	62	38.0
Once a week	19	11.7
Once a month	0	0.0
<i>How much spending for each visit?</i>		
RM1-RM5	119	73.0
RM6-RM10	34	20.9
RM11-RM15	8	4.9
RM16-RM20	2	1.2

In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2, the researchers had to test the positive or negative direction of the relationship and the correlation between the variables using Pearson Correlation analysis. It is vital to identify whether the variables have strong relationship between each other especially the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. Table 6 shows the Pearson Correlation analysis and the finding shows that all variables were significant at below 0.01, which indicated that almost 99% of the correlation relationships between the variables were existed. Brand image has recorded the highest correlation between the two independent variables with  $r= 0.742$ ,  $p< 0.000$ . This proved that there was a significant relationship between brand image and student loyalty. The correlation value is 0.742 indicates that there was a moderate positive relationship between brand image and student loyalty. The P value was at 0.000, which is, less than 0.05 shows that there is 99% confidence that the positive relationship is true.

On the other side, service quality is significant at  $r=0.689$  with  $p< 0.000$ . There is a significant relationship between service quality and student loyalty as the significant value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This shows that the positive relationship is 99% true. The correlation between both variables is at

0.689, which indicates that the strength of the correlation is a moderate positive relationship between service quality and student loyalty.

**Table 6: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Analysis of the Variables**

		Brand Image	Service Quality	Student Loyalty
Brand Image	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig (2-tailed)			
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	.789**	1	
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000		
Student Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.742**	.689**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	163	163	163

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

To answer RQ3, the researchers had to run multiple regression analysis to determine the most influential independent variable that affects the greatest towards the dependent variable. Besides that, multiple regressions will predict the variance between the dependent variable from the independent variables. Table 7 shows the result of the multiple regression analysis for the study done by the researcher. The table has shown that the F-statistics, which is, 110.219 indicates that all the variables (brand image and service quality) have a significant relationship with student loyalty. This is because the significant value was at 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This brought the result of the model is significantly fit and useful.

**Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	84.229	4	21.057	123.552	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	53.004	311	.170		
Total	137.233	315			

*Dependent Variable: Student Loyalty*  
*Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Service Quality*

Table 8 shows the result of the model summary in regression analysis. Based on the table, R-square or the coefficient determination shows the value of 0.579. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the variation of the independent variables explains the percentage of the R-square variance in the dependent variable. Thus, since the result said it has 0.579, it means that the independent variables, which are, the brand image and service quality had explained 57.9% of the variance in the dependent variable which student loyalty. The other 42.1% of the variance can be explained by the other independent variables that were not examined in this research.

**Table 8: Multiple Regression Analysis: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.761 <sup>a</sup>	.579	.574	.38833

*Dependent Variable: Student Loyalty*  
*Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Service Quality*



In Table 9, all variables; brand image and service quality contribute to the importance of relationship to student loyalty at UniShop as the significance level is below 0.05. The brand image was the most influential factor affecting student loyalty in this study. The table shows that the brand image has a significant positive relationship with student loyalty because the beta ( $\beta$ ) value is 0.471 and the value is 0.000. It is understandable that with every 1% increase in brand image, student loyalty increases by 0.471. It also shows that the quality of service has a positive impact on student loyalty. Service quality has a beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.263 with a value of 0.001. The value of p is still less than 0.05, and this means that with every 1% increase in service quality, student loyalty will increase by 0.263.

**Table 9: Multiple Regression Analysis: Coefficient**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>Student Loyalty (Constant)</b>	<b>1.012</b>	<b>0.199</b>		<b>5.094</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Brand Image</b>	<b>0.471</b>	<b>0.075</b>	<b>0.525</b>	<b>6.291</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Service Quality</b>	<b>0.263</b>	<b>0.080</b>	<b>0.275</b>	<b>3.299</b>	<b>0.001</b>

Finally, from Table 9, a regression equation can be derived to show the relationship between all the variables. In the future, the researchers may use the equation to predict student loyalty at UniShop of University J.

$$SL = 1.012 + (0.471 \times BI) + (0.263 \times SQ)$$

Where: SL = Student Loyalty; BI = Brand Image; and SQ = Service Quality

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

University stores are provided by the university as one of the facilities to accommodate their students. This study aimed to determine the relationship between brand image and service quality to student loyalty based on the UniShop case. The first research objective was to identify the relationship between brand image and student loyalty to purchase at UniShop. From the findings, the analysis of the brand image correlation shows that the brand image has a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variables of student loyalty. In addition, the multiple regression of brand image proves that brand image has a positive effect on student loyalty, which means that if the percentage of brand image increases, it will also increase student loyalty. The results of this study are also similar to previous studies conducted by other research such as Malik, Ghafoor, & Iqbal (2012), Ogba & Tan (2009), Setiawan & Devi (2016) and Yeboah et al. (2016). This is because; they believe that a better image of the product or organization, there will be an increase in customer loyalty.

The purpose of the second research was to identify the relationship between quality of service and student loyalty in purchasing at UniShop. From the findings, the correlation analysis of service quality shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between service quality and student loyalty. Besides, the multiple regression of service quality revealed that service quality had a positive effect on student loyalty, which meant that student loyalty increased when there was an increase in service quality. The findings are similar to previous studies conducted by other researchers such as Akhtar et al. (2016), Annamdevula and

Bellamkonda (2014), Jahanshahi et al. (2011), Kheng et al. (2010) in which the study produced a quality of service that affects customer loyalty. The quality of UniShop services is measured by the way management delivers services to its customers. Whether or not the customers enjoy the experience of purchasing at UniShop. This includes staff response, assurance, and trustworthiness. Customers, who measure whether or not they are friendly, are employees who understand what they want and know what they are asking for when they come to UniShop. According to the results, most students are satisfied with the staff at UniShop. Finally, for the third research objectives, brand image was the most influential variable in the study. This could be because all students at University J knew about UniShop even for newly registered students. The word-of-mouth from other students increase the brand image of UniShop. This also supported by the facts that almost of the students agree that UniShop has a good and clean image throughout their operations these years.

As a suggestion, UniShop can enhance the brand's image quality by creating unique features in the mart's store even though it is a small on-campus shop. They can also improve the types of products in the store, for example, providing more options for various product brands so that students will be more interested in choosing the products they want and increasing student loyalty. Moreover, the quality of service can be improved by installing new in-store technologies such as barcode scanners for faster transactions, newer and bigger photocopiers. In addition, they can change the layout of the store to facilitate customer movement. After making these changes, hopefully students will happily shop and visit the store more often. Finally, to increase student loyalty, not only for UniShop itself but also for J University as a whole; UniShop can produce university products that have their brand and image. This method can generate student loyalty and support for the university when they purchase items from UniShop. This is because students will feel like they belong to J University and are proud of their institutions of higher learning who can produce their stuff like any other institution. Among the items that UniShop can sell are lanyards, tagging tags, key chains, notebooks, pens and bookmarks with the university logo or UniShop.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the study had answered all research questions and achieved the research objectives. It is proven that there is a link between brand image and service quality to student loyalty, especially in the context of university stores. Therefore, for future research, researchers can add more variables to the research objectives because they can get better and higher R square along with the research being done. There are other variables can affect student or customer loyalty, such as price, marketing, and other aspects. In addition, the same research procedure can be used for geographies that have similar problem statements. Besides, future research can be done in other data collection methods such as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews or postal questionnaires, and tailor qualitative research methods to understand in-depth phenomena under study.

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