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## **DECIPHERING BRAND LOYALTY DYNAMICS IN URBAN COFFEE SHOPS THROUGH THE ECSI MODEL: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER**

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### **Abstract:**

Coffee shops have risen to become significant hubs for social interaction, productivity, and relaxation, carving out a prominent niche in contemporary urban culture. This ascent is highlighted by a discernible global surge in the demand for coffee shops, a phenomenon anticipated to persist into the foreseeable future. In response to this trend, fostering unwavering allegiance to specific coffee brands has emerged as a pivotal priority within the industry. The rationale behind this imperative lies in the fact that customers who cultivate a deep-rooted loyalty to a particular brand exhibit a heightened propensity to frequent the establishment repeatedly. This cyclic patronage bolsters customer retention rates and furnishes the establishment with a cohort of ardent advocates who readily espouse the brand's virtues. The research in question embarks on a conceptual study to explore the potential multifaceted determinants underpinning brand loyalty in urban coffee shops within the vibrant locale of the Klang Valley, Malaysia. It also aims to provide insight into future research directions within the area of interest. This research goes beyond academia, offering crucial insights for industry stakeholders and practitioners. It illuminates brand loyalty dynamics in urban coffee shops, guiding the development of customised branding and marketing strategies.

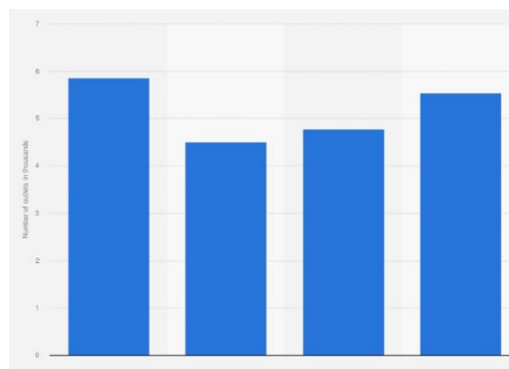
**Keywords:**

Perceived Product Quality, Perceived Service Quality, Perceived Price Value, Self-Congruity, Brand Loyalty.

## Introduction

### *Research Background*

Coffee is a globally beloved drink, with over 500 billion cups consumed annually (Felton, 2018; Motoki et al., 2021). Worldwide coffee consumption is increasing and is projected to reach 166.6 million bags in 2020-2021, up from 147 million bags in 2012-2013 (Statista, 2022; Vu et al., 2022). This trend continues, with the International Coffee Organization (2023) forecasting a 5.8% increase in total coffee production to 178.0 million bags in 2023-2024. In Malaysia, the coffee industry is thriving, with both national and local coffee shop chains experiencing significant growth, especially among millennials (Rahim et al., 2019; Ali & Ramanathan, 2021). Malaysia ranks among the top 50 coffee-consuming countries globally (Rahim et al., 2019; Ali & Ramanathan, 2021). Forecasts suggest Malaysia will have over 2,775 branded coffee shops by 2025 (World Coffee Portal, 2023). As of 2022, Malaysia had around 4.78 thousand cafes and bars, which is expected to rise to about 5.54 thousand by 2026 (Statista, 2023). The number reflects the fast-paced lifestyle of modern Malaysia, where coffee is increasingly popular as a stimulating beverage (Khandaker et al., 2020).



**Figure 1: Total Number of Cafes and Bars in Malaysia, With a Forecast For 2026.**

Source: Statista, 2023.

The importance of increasing brand loyalty to attract and retain customers in the competitive coffee shop industry is emphasised by several researchers (Jeon & Jo, 2011; Lee & Yeu, 2010; Shin et al., 2012; Yu & Fang, 2009; Suhud et al., 2021). Brand loyalty has become strategically essential for coffee businesses to thrive sustainably in today's marketplace. Furthermore, Suhud et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of self-congruity in maintaining brand loyalty. According to self-congruity theory, consumer behaviour is influenced by the alignment between the product-user image and the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy et al., 1997; Li et al., 2022). In this study, the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) Model will be used to explore the potential factors of brand loyalty in urban coffee shops in the Klang Valley. Bertaccini et al. (2021) described ECSI as a method to measure customer satisfaction by analysing cause-effect relationships between conceptual variables. The study focuses on exploring the underpinning of the seven hypothetical constructs, mainly from the ECSI model,

to bridge a potential relationship for future research direction in brand loyalty. The seven constructs that are the focus of the study are image, expectations, perceived product and service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. The concept suggests that customer satisfaction drives brand loyalty, which can be enhanced by improving customer satisfaction (Revilla-Camacho et al., 2017).

### ***Problem Statement***

Brand loyalty has become significantly important in the fiercely competitive international coffee landscape (Han et al., 2018). Thus, coffee brands in Malaysia must prioritise maintaining brand loyalty for sustainable success, especially with major brands like Starbucks and The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf expanding continuously and conquering the market (Dhisasmitho et al., 2020). Customer loyalty to a brand is imperative in the face of intense competition in the coffee shop industry, with local establishments facing challenges from international brands (Dhisasmitho et al., 2020). Indeed, self-congruity potentially influences brand loyalty mediation (Li et al., 2022). Thus, understanding brand concept loyalty is crucial for marketers to enhance it concerning self-congruity (Hawkins, 2013; Bernarto et al., 2020). Customers tend to persist in purchasing a particular brand due to strong brand loyalty (Keller, 2009, as cited in Song et al., 2019). However, effective staff performance and goal achievement are crucial for preventing customer dissatisfaction in coffee shops (Bruhn, 2003; Son et al., 2021). Moreover, the positive impression associated with a specific brand influences consumer decision-making processes, fostering consistent purchases (Lam, 2007; Martenson, 2007; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016; Song et al., 2019).

Coffee shops have received comparatively less academic attention despite the proliferation of studies in various service industries (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020). More research is needed to understand the underlying reasons contributing to a positive customer experience in coffee shops (Ren et al., 2023). Specifically, studies on consumer behaviour, satisfaction, and loyalty in the coffee shop industry are essential (Han et al., 2018). The lack of research in this domain presents an opportunity for future studies to improve customer loyalty and strengthen the coffee shop industry (Lee G.W. et al., 2018). This research aims to address these challenges, focusing on coffee shops in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The Klang Valley, being the largest urban area in the country, serves as an ideal setting to study and propose solutions for issues prevalent in the coffee shop industry. Understanding customers' needs and preferences in this region can lead to improved brand loyalty, contributing to increased success and profitability for coffee shops. Thus, this study aims to provide relevant arguments on the potential constructs to understand the possible factors influencing brand loyalty from the consumer's perspective, utilising ECSI Model variables for better comprehension and suggestions for future research undertaking.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Coffee Shop***

Chaudhuri and Holbrook's research, mentioned by Suhud et al. (2021), is famous for its insights into brand loyalty, discussing two types: attitudinal and behavioural. Companies want customers to keep buying their products, as noted by Githiri (2018, cited in Dhisasmitho et al., 2020). Brand loyalty means customers keep buying a brand over time because they like it and feel connected to it emotionally (Oliver, 1999; Song et al., 2019). Loyal customers buy more often, attract new customers, and spread positive word-of-mouth (Han et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). Brand loyalty is about choosing one brand over others repeatedly and is linked to

psychological processes (Jacoby, 1971; Han et al., 2020). It's crucial for a company's success and is extensively studied (Hwang & Lee, 2018; Ko and Chiu, 2008; Rizvi et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2021). Companies with loyal customers get more market share, higher returns, and positive word-of-mouth (Nawaz and Usman, 2011, cited in Han et al., 2020). In coffee shops, satisfying customers by providing what they want is key to building brand loyalty (Song et al., 2019). Managers should focus on customer satisfaction by understanding what each customer likes (Song et al., 2019).

Coffee shops and bars in Malaysia increased to around 4.78 thousand establishments in 2023, up from about 4.51 thousand the previous year. Projections suggest this number will rise to around 5.54 thousand by 2026. The popularity of coffee is growing in Malaysia, evident in the rise of coffee shops. The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf Malaysia celebrated its 150th café opening, while ZUS Coffee and Gigi Coffee, both launched in 2019, have rapidly expanded to 325 and 130 stores, respectively. Malaysians now consume an average of 2.38 cups of coffee daily, influenced by global brands like Starbucks. Modern coffee shops are ubiquitous, providing enjoyable spaces for socialising. The coffee market revenue in Malaysia was RM957.80 million in 2023, with an expected annual growth rate of 4.21% from 2023 to 2028. The widespread availability of coffee shops has transformed coffee into a social and cultural phenomenon, attracting customers not just for the caffeine but for the overall experience. This trend is contributing to the global rise in coffee consumption. The study conducted by Dhisasmitho et al. (2020) demonstrates that, as expected, the quality of service significantly and positively influences customer satisfaction within the local coffee shop industry. This finding aligns with the results of previous studies, further validating the critical role that high service standards play in enhancing customer satisfaction. The results of Han et al.'s (2020) study indicated that patrons' brand satisfaction was the most influential factor in developing their brand loyalty. Undoubtedly, increasing the level of brand loyalty has become one of the most critical and challenging issues in the competitive chain coffee shop industry. Nevertheless, the process of how patrons form loyalty to a specific chain coffee shop brand has not been sufficiently explored.

### ***The European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) Model***

ECSI Model is a strong framework for evaluating service quality in organisations, as noted by Johnson et al. (2001) and Revilla-Camacho et al. (2017). It offers a structured way to measure customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, helping businesses understand their performance. Developed by European experts, the ECSI ensures a consistent measure of customer satisfaction. In Malaysia, using the ECSI could be beneficial because it can adapt to both European and Malaysian markets, providing accurate insights into customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This model evaluates services or products from the customer's viewpoint, offering a global perspective on the entire customer experience. By using the ECSI, this study aims to integrate a globally recognised model into the Malaysian coffee shop industry to evaluate customer brand loyalty thoroughly.

### ***Perceived Product Quality***

Ma et al. (2010), cited in Majid et al. (2018), emphasised that product quality matters more than things like the store's atmosphere or service. This means how good the coffee tastes is really important for all kinds of places that sell food and drinks. Millennials, especially, care a lot about the taste of their coffee and are happy to pay more for better quality (Ali & Ramanathan, 2021). Chebat and Michon (2003), mentioned in Li et al. (2022), said that how customers feel about the quality of the coffee is connected to how the coffee shop looks and

feels. Ha and Jang (2010), also mentioned in Majid et al. (2018), said that if the coffee is good, customers are likelier to return, which builds loyalty.

Tarigan et al. (2020) said that good coffee can make people want to go to a coffee shop. In the service industry, "perceived quality" means how good customers think a particular place is compared to what they expect (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Han et al., 2020). Brands need to offer something special to customers (Sethuraman, 2000; Li et al., 2022). Taylor and Hunter (2002), mentioned in Han et al. (2020), said that when customers think a place is really good, they are happy, talk about it to others, and keep coming back.

It's important for coffee shops to understand how important the quality of their coffee is for making customers come back (Li et al., 2022). If the coffee is good, it makes customers feel good about themselves when they buy it. By offering something special and keeping the coffee quality high, coffee shops can make customers come back again and again, even in a competitive market. Coffee shops work hard to make their coffee better to keep customers coming back. Even if someone doesn't love coffee, they still care about how good it tastes when they drink it (Suhud et al., 2021).

The literature analysis conducted suggests a compelling association between perceived product quality and overarching brand loyalty, indicating a rich area for further exploration in future research endeavours. This potential correlation extends beyond mere consumer perception to encompass broader market dynamics, wherein the perceived quality of a product becomes intricately intertwined with the reputation and standing of the brand itself. By delving into this relationship, researchers may uncover nuanced insights into consumer behaviour and brand loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis could be considered:

***H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived product quality and brand loyalty of coffee shops.***

### ***Perceived Service Quality***

Service quality is how well a business meets customer expectations (Setiawan & Sayuti, 2017; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). This study confirms that good service makes customers happy in coffee shops. Fair prices also matter to customers. When prices match what customers expect, they feel like they're getting their money's worth (O'Cass and Grace, 2008, cited in Li et al., 2022). Poor service doesn't help keep customers loyal (Majid et al., 2018). So, businesses should focus on giving customers what they want to keep them coming back. Customers like coffee shops with lots of services to enjoy (Tarigan et al., 2020). But we still don't fully understand how product quality, service, and the environment affect customer satisfaction and behaviour. When customers are happy with the service they get, it shows that the business is doing a good job (Jiang and Wang, 2006, cited in Han et al., 2018).

To get and keep more customers, coffee shop owners need to improve things like the quality of their products, their service, how customers see them, and their prices (Suhud et al., 2021). Many studies show that better service makes customers want to come back (Carranza, Díaz, & Martín-Consuegra, 2018; Mhlanga, 2018; Hyun, 2010). Understanding things like how customers see the service they get can really affect how loyal they are to a coffee shop. When customers are happy with the service they get, it makes them feel good overall. This can make them want to come back again and again (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Han et al., 2018). Studying how the service affects how loyal customers are to coffee shops can help us learn more about



how businesses can do better. Ultimately, giving good service can help a coffee shop do well in a busy market.

The analysis of existing literature indicates a potential connection between perceived service quality and overall brand loyalty, suggesting an area ripe for further investigation in future research endeavours. Exploring this relationship could yield valuable insights into consumer behaviour and the factors influencing brand loyalty. Consequently, the following hypothesis merits consideration:

***H2: There is a significant relationship between perceived service quality and brand loyalty of coffee shops.***

### ***Perceived Price Value***

Price value is how customers decide if a product's price is fair. It's a big factor in how customers act (Jin et al., 2016; Dhisasmito et al., 2020). Positive behaviour like recommending, coming back, or accepting higher prices is linked to feeling good about prices (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020). But good service isn't just about good products; it's also about making the place and the service itself pleasant (Abdullah et al., 2018, cited in Dhisasmito et al., 2020). When customers feel like they're getting their money's worth for their coffee, it makes their visit better. But if they think the prices are unfair or too high, they might feel annoyed (Dhisasmito et al., 2020). Fair prices help customers feel happy and satisfied, which can lead to them being more loyal to the coffee shop (Bassey, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2023).

Customers also think about price when deciding how much they like a coffee shop (Hanaysha, 2016, cited in Dhisasmito et al., 2020). Customers like to get good value for their money, so brands try to set prices that feel right to customers (Githiri, 2018, cited in Dhisasmito et al., 2020). They also consider how big the portions are and how their prices compare to other places (Tarigan et al., 2020). Understanding how price affects brand loyalty in coffee shops helps businesses make better decisions and keeps customers coming back.

The literature review reveals a compelling link between perceived service quality and the broader concept of brand loyalty, signalling an area ripe for deeper exploration in future research endeavours. As a result, the following hypothesis emerges as worthy of exploration:

***H3: There is a significant relationship between perceived price value and brand loyalty of coffee shops.***

### ***Self-congruity***

As defined by Sirgy (1985) and referenced in Joo et al. (2020), self-congruity refers to the alignment between how a consumer perceives a product and their actual self. This theory suggests that consumers' behaviour is influenced by how well a product matches their self-concept (Sirgy et al., 1997). Studies have shown that brand loyalty can be affected by self-congruity, where customers are more likely to be loyal to brands that align with their self-image (Suhud et al., 2021). For example, if a coffee brand portrays itself as adventurous, it may attract customers who see themselves in a similar way. Self-congruity encompasses various aspects like actual self-congruity, social self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy and Samli, 1985). It has been found to positively impact customer perceptions of service quality (Quester et al., 2000). This alignment between a customer's self-concept and

a brand's image can influence their attitudes and behaviours, ultimately leading to increased loyalty (Han, Moon, & Kim, 2019).

In the context of coffee shops, self-congruity occurs when the image of a coffee brand matches the customer's self-concept. For example, a health-conscious customer may prefer a coffee shop that offers organic, sustainably sourced coffee. This alignment strengthens the customer's connection to the brand, leading to more positive attitudes and increased loyalty (Liu et al., 2012). Understanding the relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty is crucial for coffee shop owners and managers. By tailoring their offerings to match customers' self-concepts, they can enhance customer experiences, foster loyalty, and drive business success. Additionally, studying these relationships contributes to our broader understanding of consumer behaviour and branding strategies in the coffee shop industry. Consequently, the following hypothesis merits consideration:

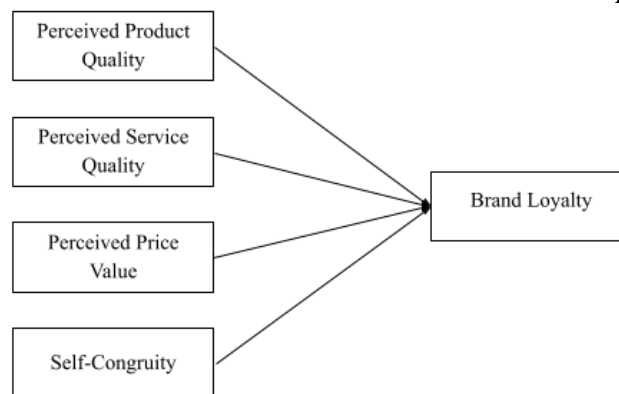
***H4: There is a significant relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty of coffee shops.***

#### ***The European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) Model***

ECSI Model is a strong framework for evaluating service quality in organisations, as noted by Johnson et al. (2001) and Revilla-Camacho et al. (2017). It offers a structured way to measure customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, helping businesses understand their performance. Developed by European experts, the ECSI ensures a consistent measure of customer satisfaction. In Malaysia, using the ECSI could be beneficial because it can adapt to both European and Malaysian markets, providing accurate insights into customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This model evaluates services or products from the customer's viewpoint, offering a global perspective on the entire customer experience. By using the ECSI, this study aims to integrate a globally recognised model into the Malaysian coffee shop industry to evaluate customer satisfaction and brand loyalty thoroughly.

#### **Propose Conceptual Framework**

The proposed conceptual framework offers a structured approach for investigating the complex relationships between perceived product quality, perceived service quality, perceived price value, self-congruity, and brand loyalty, drawing from arguments and literature studies. This framework serves as a guide for future research endeavours to understand the intricate dynamics of consumer behaviour and brand management. Through empirical research guided by this framework, businesses can gain valuable insights to bolster brand loyalty and foster enduring relationships with their customers. Through empirical research guided by this framework, businesses can gain valuable insights into how to bolster brand loyalty and foster enduring relationships with their customers. Consequently, this framework provides a robust foundation for both academic research and practical applications in brand management, offering a pathway to improved customer retention and competitive advantage in the market.



**Figure 2 Propose Conceptual Framework.**

### **Propose Research Methodology**

This research falls under applied research, which addresses specific practical problems by applying existing knowledge to find solutions. A future study is suggested to conduct an empirical methodology with the aim of examining the factors influencing brand loyalty in coffee shops. By exploring the quantitative, correlational relationship between perceived product quality, perceived service quality, perceived price value, and brand loyalty, the future study will be able to provide deeper insights into what drives customer loyalty in the coffee shop industry. Future research is suggested to conduct a correlational study with a cross-sectional approach. This method will allow researchers to gather information about customers' behaviours towards choosing coffee shop brands at a specific point in time in a natural, non-manipulated setting. Through surveys, the study will quantify the impact of various factors on brand loyalty, offering actionable recommendations for coffee shop owners and marketers to enhance customer loyalty and retention strategies. Data are suggested to be collected from a diverse group of coffee shop customers in the Klang Valley region. Data will be collected using a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. To ensure anonymity, the questionnaire will be distributed to targeted sample through social media advertisements. However, other studies which aim to be conducted in different geographic regions are also suggested.

Sampling is crucial for precise data collection and defining the study population. It involves selecting a group from a larger population to make inferences about that population. Future studies are suggested to use probability sampling methods through simple random sampling if only one group of respondents is aimed. However, if multi-group analysis is to be conducted, stratified random sampling is suggested. Somehow, if no sampling frame is available for the study population, non-probability sampling through purposive sampling is suggested in order to achieve the research objectives. The study population suggested for future studies must be the customers of the coffee shops to ensure the data correctly measures brand loyalty.

For forthcoming research, it's advised to employ a self-reported questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. This type of questionnaire simplifies respondent participation, resulting in higher response rates and reduced fatigue. Furthermore, its ordinal nature allows for the collection of nuanced data, capturing subtle variations in attitudes or perceptions. The standardised framework of the Likert scale enables comparability across different studies and populations. Researchers should ensure clarity and impartiality in item wording and conduct pilot testing to optimise survey implementation. By leveraging these benefits, researchers can enhance the quality of their data and gain valuable insights into their research area.



Future analysis is suggested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to provide an advanced data analysis that is reliable, valid, and robust data analysis. This method assesses relationships between variables in a theoretical model. It starts by confirming the reliability and validity of latent constructs, then evaluates relationships through path coefficients. Bootstrapping estimates significance, while metrics like R-squared and Q<sup>2</sup> assess predictive relevance. Cross-validation ensures robustness. PLS-SEM is chosen for its effectiveness in handling complex models and smaller sample sizes.

The 10-times rule is suggested in determining the minimum sample size to ensure it is sufficient for data analysis using SEM. The 10-time rule guideline can be used for each 1 survey item, 10 numbers of respondents are needed. Thus, if the study uses a total of 25 survey items, a minimum sample size of 250 is needed. The data should be properly decoded, cleaned, and prepared before hypothesis testing can be carried out. The reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity should be confirmed before hypothesis testing is carried out by future research.

## Conclusion

As coffee shops solidify their status as central hubs for socialization, work, and relaxation in urban settings, their global demand continues to rise steadily. This trend is anticipated to persist, making cultivating brand loyalty an increasingly crucial priority for the industry. Brand loyalty is vital because customers who develop a strong allegiance to a particular coffee brand tend to frequent the establishment repeatedly, thereby enhancing customer retention rates and fostering a group of dedicated brand advocates. This research delves into the intricate determinants of brand loyalty within the bustling urban landscape of the Klang Valley, Malaysia. By exploring various factors influencing brand loyalty in coffee shops, this paper aims to shed light on this phenomenon and provide valuable insights for future research endeavours. Beyond academia, our findings offer practical guidance for industry stakeholders and practitioners. Understanding the dynamics of brand loyalty in urban coffee shops can inform the development of customized branding and marketing strategies tailored to meet the evolving needs and preferences of customers in this vibrant locale.

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