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EXAMINING BRAND IMAGE AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: ALTERNATIVE ROLES OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AS MEDIATOR AND MODERATOR

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships among brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, focusing on the mediating and moderating role of customer satisfaction. Empirical analysis demonstrates that brand image significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction is a bridge that strengthens the connection between brand image and customer loyalty. The findings underscore the critical role of customer satisfaction in fostering brand loyalty and reinforcing a positive brand image. Businesses, particularly those in the coffee chain industry, can leverage these insights to optimize marketing strategies. By improving product and service quality and aligning brand values with customer expectations, companies can achieve long-term customer loyalty and sustainable growth. The findings contribute to understanding how brand image, when supported by consistent customer satisfaction efforts, can drive loyalty and competitive advantages in the dynamic coffee shop market.

Key Words: Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Mediation, Moderation.

Introduction

In today's competitive business landscape, a strong brand image is as essential as product and service quality.

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Brands with high customer loyalty achieve greater market share and command premium pricing, underscoring the importance of brand image as a strategic asset. Research indicates the significant impact of brand image on customer satisfaction and loyalty—key business performance benchmarks (Andreani et al., 2012; Malik et al., 2021; Yum & Yoo, 2023). Satisfied customers tend to exhibit loyalty through premium purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and sustained commitment. Thus, brand image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty are indispensable marketing tools. Despite their importance, businesses face ongoing challenges in cultivating and maintaining these elements in dynamic markets.

Research confirms a significant positive correlation between satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting satisfaction as a key driver of repeat purchases and sustainable business growth. Satisfaction also reinforces brand trust by enhancing confidence and protecting customer interests (Ganesan, 1994; Oliver, 1993). Positive brand perceptions, facilitated by customer satisfaction, foster attachment, and attitudinal loyalty. Satisfied customers are more likely to pay a premium, promote the brand through word-of-mouth, and stay committed long-term (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Schultz, 2005).

Based on the above discussion and theoretical background, brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty are fundamental elements that significantly affect company success. This study explored how customer satisfac-tion affects and strengthens the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty, highlighting its role in enhancing these connections. The research questions are as follows: Does brand image positively affect customer satisfaction and loyalty? Does customer satisfaction have a relationship with customer loyalty? Does customer satisfaction play the role of mediator and moderator between brand image and customer loyalty?

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Literature Review

Brand Image. Brand image reflects consumer perceptions, including product functionality, emotional connection, and symbolic value (Keller, 1998). A strong brand image aligns consumer expectations with experiences, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Brand mystery is shaped by past interactions and consumers' imagination regarding the brand's narrative and future potential. This aligns with Roberts' (2004) perspective that storytelling and brand legend deepen consumer identification and foster emotional connection.

Brand sensuality comprises sensory experiences, such as visuals, scents, and sounds, creating memorable consumer experiences (Hultén, 2019; Roberts, 2004). Brand intimacy represents the emotional connections and interactions between consumers and brands. Berger et al. (2012) highlight that consumers' emotional attachment to a brand

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stems not only from the product itself but also from the brand's demonstration of understanding and care. These dimensions of brand image—mystery, sensuality, and intimacy—are essential for marketing promotion, emphasizing the need for storytelling, sensory experiences, and emotional connections.

Customer Satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is the emotional response to aligning expectations and actual experiences (Kotler, 2012), vital for business success. It drives future purchase intentions, enhances brand loyalty, and promotes positive word-of-mouth (Kumar et al., 2020). Satisfied customers are crucial in strengthening brand reputation while fostering long-term customer relationships, which are essential for business growth and competitive advantages.

Customer Loyalty. Customer loyalty is pivotal for long-term success, involving repeat purchases, referrals, and positive word-of-mouth (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Key factors including service quality, pricing, and the physical environment significantly influence loyalty, especially in the service sector (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Higher satisfaction and retention strengthen profitability, stabilize the customer base, and reduce marketing costs (Woodside & Moore, 1987; Bowen & Chen, 2001).

Hypotheses Development: Building Interconnected Constructs Main Effects

Brand image and customer satisfaction are two independent variables of the baseline model that do not affect each other on the effect to customer loyalty.

Relationships between Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction. Research confirms the positive influence of brand image on customer satisfaction. A strong brand image, particularly when aligned with cultural values, strengthens satisfaction across various service sectors (Rusmahafi & Wulandari, 2020). Furthermore, a strong brand image drives satisfaction while encouraging behavioral intentions like repurchasing and word-of-mouth (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2021).

H1: Brand image positively impacts customer satisfaction.

Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty. Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of repeat purchases and long-term customer retention. Research illustrates a significant positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty intentions across multiple industries (Gustafsson, 2005). Due to other influencing factors, high satisfaction does not necessarily guarantee loyalty (Reichheld & Detrick, 2003); however, satisfaction remains a critical driver of behaviors such as repeat purchasing and word-of-mouth (Yang & Peterson, 2004).

H2: Customer satisfaction positively relates to customer loyalty.

Relationship between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty. The connection between brand image and customer loyalty is well-established; positive brand

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images play a crucial role in fostering long-term loyalty (Hess & Story, 2005). A strong brand image can enhance perceived value and trust, which is essential for loyalty (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Brand image consistency fosters emotional connection and trust, further reinforcing loyalty (Andreani et al., 2012; Meng et al., 2021).

H3: Brand image positively impacts customer loyalty.

Mediation. Some studies suggested that customer satisfaction may mediate the influence of brand image on customer loyalty. Particularly, the manipulation to increase the mediating role of customer satisfaction could provide a clear explanation of how the indirect influence of brand image can raise customer loyalty. Research has identified satisfaction as a key mediator that enhances the impact of brand image on customer behaviors, such as repurchasing and recommendations (Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998; Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004). Lee et al. (2022) demonstrated that satisfaction strengthens the connection between brand image and customer retention by fostering trust and increasing repurchase intentions. This confirms the essential role of satisfaction in solidifying loyalty through a positive brand image.

H4: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty.

Moderation. Customer satisfaction enhances brand trust while amplifying loyalty by strengthening the link be-

tween brand image and customer behavior. It safeguards customer interests and fosters confidence, establishing itself as a cornerstone of loyalty (Ganesan, 1994; Oliver, 1993). Satisfied customers are more likely to pay a premium, provide positive word-of-mouth, and maintain loyalty (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Schultz, 2005). Recent studies confirm its moderating role, particularly in service-oriented contexts, where satisfaction strengthens the effect of service quality on loyalty (Yum & Yoo, 2023). Malik et al. (2021) demonstrate that high satisfaction strengthens loyalty, even in dynamic markets, highlighting its critical moderating role.

H5: Customer satisfaction moderates the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the impact of causal variables on their outcomes. We used existing theories to develop the hypotheses while testing them using SPSS software data analysis.

Sampling

This study focused on brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. We employed a simple random sampling method with data collected from 200 Starbucks customers. Table 1 presents the demographic statistics based on the questionnaire data on customer perceptions, preferences, and demographic information.

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Table 1. Demographic Statistics.

Variable	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	87	43.5%
	Female	113	56.5%
Age	<20	13	6.5%
	21-30	80	40.0%
	31-40	66	33.0%
	41-50	22	11.0%
	>50	19	9.5%
Education	Senior high school	38	19.0%
	College	71	35.5%
	Master's degree or other	91	45.5%
Monthly Income	Less than $300	73	36.5%
	$301 - $450	43	21.5%
	$451- $ 600	46	23.0%
	$601- $1,000	28	14.0%
	More than $1,000	10	5.0%

Reliability Test

Table 2 shows that all variables and dimensions had Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7, demonstrating high reliability and good internal consistency.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Test.

Variables	Items	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Image	Mystery	6	.881
	Sensuality	7	.894
	Intimacy	10	.903
Customer Satisfaction		5	.791
Customer Loyalty	Attitude	4	.863
	Behavior	2	.784

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Measuring Brand Image

Brand image was measured using 23 items adapted from Roberts (2004) and Cho (2011). Table 3 illustrates that factor analysis confirmed the validity of all items: loadings exceeded .60, Eigenvalue exceeded 1, cumulative variance reached 61.042%, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) exceeded .883.

Table 3. Factor Analysis of Brand Image.

Dimensions	Code	Items	Factor Loading
Mystery	X1.1	This brand adds to my life experience.	.771
	X1.2	This brand adds to the quality of my life.	.639
	X1.3	This brand always has what I am looking for.	.609
	X1.4	This brand inspires good memories for me.	.712
	X1.5	This brand comes to mind immediately when I want to purchase a coffee product.	.733
	X1.6	This brand is a part of my life.	.692
Sensuality	X1.7	The design of the brand's packaging really appeals to me.	.761
	X1.8	This brand's advertisements are well-designed.	.766
	X1.9	The brand packaging is as pleasing as the product.	.601
	X1.10	The aroma of the store environment associated with this brand is pleasing.	.660
	X1.11	The store environment of this brand appeals to me.	.776
	X1.12	The website design for this brand is well done.	.707
	X1.13	This brand has a beautiful color scheme.	.662
Intimacy	X1.14	I am confident that my relationship with this brand will last long.	.785
	X1.15	I feel fortunate that I can buy products related to this brand.	.709
	X1.16	I feel happy when I use products associated with this brand.	.754
	X1.17	I feel satisfied with this brand.	.686
	X1.18	I like looking at the products of this brand.	.678
	X1.19	I really enjoy using this brand.	.766
	X1.20	I see this brand as cool.	.657
	X1.21	I will always trust this brand.	.695
	X1.22	I would be disappointed if this brand was no longer available.	.617
	X1.23	I plan to stay with this brand.	.679

KMO=0.883; Cumulative%=61.042%; Approx.Chi-Square=3210.235; Eigenvalue>1; Sig.=.000

This indicates sampling adequacy for measurement.

Measuring Customer Satisfaction

We created a five-item scale to measure customer satisfaction based on Homburg et al. (2006), Oliver (1993), and Tu et al. (2012). Table 4 illustrates that factor analysis confirmed the validity of all items: loadings exceeded .60, Eigenvalue exceeded 1, cumulative variance reached 58.618%, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) exceeded .781. This confirms strong sampling adequacy.

Table 4. Factor Analysis of Customer Satisfaction.

Dimensions	Code	Items	Factor Loading
Customer Satisfaction	X2.1	I am satisfied with my decision to buy coffee at this coffeehouse brand.	.841
	X2.2	I have truly enjoyed this coffeehouse brand.	.792
	X2.3	I feel good about my decision to buy coffee at this coffeehouse brand.	.819
	X2.4	Using this coffeehouse brand has been a good experience.	.786
	X2.5	I am sure it was the right thing to be a customer of this coffeehouse brand.	.655

KMO=0.781; Cumulative%=58.618%; Approx. Chi-Square=380.736; Eigenvalue >1; Sig.=.000

Measuring Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty was measured through two main factors: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Initially, six items were used based on Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Choi and Kim (2013). Table 5 illustrates that factor analysis confirmed the validity of all items: loadings exceeded .60, Eigenvalue exceeded 1, cumulative variance reached 76.033%, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) exceeded .751, indicating good sampling adequacy.

Empirical Analysis Results

Correlation

The mean values of all variables exceeded 4. This indicates that most respondents responded positively to all variables. Deviations ranged from .40 to .60 on the 5-point Likert scale. The highest correlation value, .70, was observed between customer satisfaction and intimacy; the lowest, 0.14, occurred between attitude and sensuality. Table 6 shows that all correlations were statistically significant, confirming the validity of the relationships among variables.

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Table 5. Factor Analysis of Customer Loyalty.

Dimensions	Code	Items	Factor Loading
Attitude	X3.1	Starbucks is my first choice	.746
	X3.2	I intend to continue buying Starbucks coffee in the future.	.896
	X3.3	If I need coffee, Starbucks would be my preferred choice.	.856
	X3.4	Even if another brand has the same features, I prefer to buy from Starbucks.	.841
Behavior	X3.5	I would recommend Starbucks coffee to friends and relatives.	.889
	X3.6	I will speak positively about this coffeehouse brand.	.913

KMO=0.751;Cumulative%=76.033%;Approx. Chi-Square= 540.612; Eigenvalue >1; Sig.=.000

Table 6. Overall Correlations between All Variables.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Brand Image			Customer Satisfaction	Customer Loyalty	
			1	2	3	4	5	6
1	4.1483	.54291	1					
2	4.3514	.48627	.645**	1				
3	4.2195	.45487	.638**	.587**	1			
4	4.2940	.47103	.451**	.385**	.700**	1		
5	4.1275	.60825	.313**	.141*	.599**	.632**	1	
6	4.2325	.61161	.400**	..472**	.659**	.454**	.268**	1

Note: **p < .001 (2-tailed)

Testing for the Main Effects, H1, H2, and H3

Table 7 shows that the main effects hypotheses were supported between and among brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (β=.602, R^2=.363, p<.001 for H1; β=.698, R^2=.487, p<.001 for H2; β=.601, R^2=.361, p<.001 for H3).

Table 7. Regression Analysis of the Main Effects.

Effects		β	R^2	VIF	Sig.
Brand Image ——H1—→ Customer Satisfaction		.602	.363	1	p<.001
Customer Satisfaction ——H2—→ Customer Loyalty		.698	.487	1	p<.001
Brand Image ——H3—→ Customer Loyalty		.601	.361	1	p<.001

Sobel Test for Mediation, H4

Preacher and Leonardelli (2001) developed a Sobel test to evaluate mediation effects by examining the critical ratio. The present study used the Sobel test to investigate the impact of customer loyalty and brand image through an intermediary group motivation. The Sobel test results in Figure 1 revealed a critical ratio of 6.76, p<.001, which is sufficient to confirm mediation.
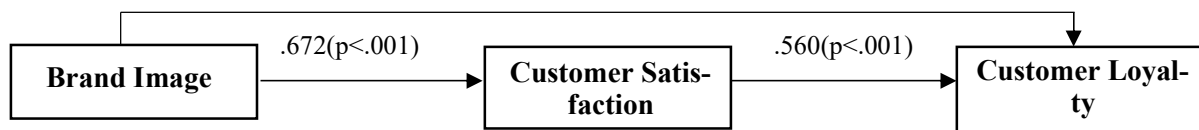
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┌───────────────┐   .672(p<.001)   ┌───────────────┐   .560(p<.001)   ┌───────────────┐
│  Brand Image  │ ───────────────→ │ Customer Satis-│ ───────────────→ │ Customer Loyal-│
│               │                  │    faction     │                  │      ty        │
└───────────────┘                  └───────────────┘                  └───────────────┘
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Figure 1. Sobel Test.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Moderation, H5

Cohen and Wills (1985) emphasized the need to examine both the main effect and interaction models to fully capture moderating effects. Therefore, we used a hierarchical regression analysis to test moderation. Figure 2 shows that the hypothesis was not supported, since the interaction term of brand image and customer satisfaction had a p-value exceeding .05, indicating non statistical significance). A lack of statistical significance implies that customer satisfaction did not significantly affect how brand

image influenced customer loyalty in this study.

Discussion and Contributions

Overall Hypotheses

Table 8 presents all hypotheses' results, indicating that the main effects and mediators were all supported. The combined findings highlight the essential role of customer satisfaction as a mediator between brand image and customer loyalty. This indicates that a strong brand image can enhance customer satisfaction, fostering customer loyalty. However, satisfaction did not significantly moderate the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty, indicating that other factors may influence this relationship.
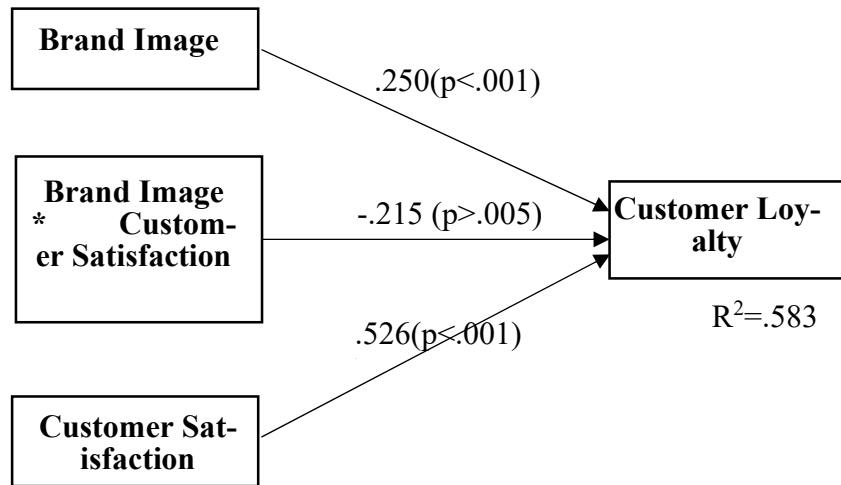
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Figure 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Moderation.

Table 8. Overall Hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Items	Result
H1.1.1	Brand image positively affects customer satisfaction (β=.602, R^2= .363, p<.001).	Supported
H1.1.2	There was a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (β=.698, R^2= .487, p<.001).	Supported
H1.1.3	There was a significant positive relationship between brand image and customer loyalty (β=.601, R^2= .361, p<.001).	Supported
H1.2.1	Customer satisfaction mediated the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty (Sobel test statistic=6.76, p<.001).	Supported
H1.3.1	Customer satisfaction was a moderating variable between brand image and customer loyalty (β=-.215, R^2=.583, p>.005).	Not supported

Discussion

This study examined the relationships between brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, focusing on mediation and moderation effects.

The findings indicate significant positive correlations with customer loyalty developed through repeat, satisfying brand experiences. A strong brand image aligns with customer perceptions, enabling more effective marketing strategies.

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Satisfaction was pivotal in influencing loyalty and reinforcing brand image. The findings highlight customer satisfaction's mediating role in linking brand image to loyalty, as satisfied customers drive positive perceptions and loyalty.

This study has confirmed the significant impact of brand image on customer satisfaction, subsequently driving loyalty. Customer satisfaction mediated the brand image–loyalty relationship, strengthening its connection while emphasizing its central role in brand management. This study underscores the importance of managing customer satisfaction to build loyalty and improve brand reputation. For companies like Starbucks, these insights can refine marketing strategies, enhance customer experiences, and foster long-term loyalty. By generating a cycle where brand image, satisfaction, and loyalty reinforce each other, businesses can enhance brand value.

Research Contributions

This study provides new perspectives on the role of brand image in the coffee chain industry, demonstrating its dependence on customer satisfaction. Key contributions highlight the central role of customer satisfaction in shaping brand perceptions while fostering loyalty in the service industry. Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of aligning brand image development with customer needs and values to enhance brand identity. The results provide strategic insights for businesses to integrate customer satisfaction into branding efforts, driving growth and innovation.

For Starbucks and other coffee chains, the results of this study offer valuable empirical findings. For instance, companies need to focus on core competencies to provide such customer needs (concerning customer satisfaction) through product quality, sensory experiences, and customer convenience. These factors are essential for thriving in a competitive market while maintaining a competitive edge. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance brand experiences. Companies can invest in creating holistic and memorable brand experiences to foster greater customer loyalty. By aligning brand values with customer expectations, businesses can strengthen consumer perceptions and loyalty. These strategies can promote growth and sustainability in the competitive coffee industry.

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