



Determinants of Customer Satisfaction in the Coffee Chain Industry: Evidence from Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

As a globally recognized coffeehouse chain, Starbucks operates in a highly competitive industry where understanding customer preferences is essential for sustaining a competitive advantage. This study examines the determinants of customer satisfaction among coffee chain customers in Malaysia, using Starbucks as the focal case context, with emphasis on product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 200 Starbucks customers through an online questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS, including reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that the model explains 62.7% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.627$, $F = 81.968$, $p < 0.001$). All four variables were found to be statistically significant predictors, with price fairness emerging as the strongest determinant ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.001$), followed by brand image ($\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$), service quality ($\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.01$), and product quality ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that customer satisfaction is driven more by perceived value and brand-related factors than by product attributes alone. Practically, managers should emphasize value-based strategies while maintaining consistent service quality to enhance customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand Image; Customer Satisfaction; Price Fairness; Product Quality; Service Quality

INTRODUCTION

The coffee culture around the world has changed significantly over the past decade. Today, it is no longer only about coffee beans and pricing; rather, it has evolved into an 'experience economy', where the atmosphere, physical surroundings, and store design play a crucial role (Bitner, 1992; Pandey et al., 2021). Starbucks has established itself as a clear leader in this area with its specific "third place" concept, a space that is neither home nor workplace, but one where customers feel comfortable spending time. The new reality post-pandemic presents new challenges to high-end coffee chains. Consumers are also becoming cost-sensitive with increasingly high demands on service and consistency (Lim, 2022). In Malaysia, the coffee scene has escalated quickly, with Starbucks being one of the market leaders. However, the market is gradually becoming saturated with homegrown cafes offering high-quality coffee at competitive costs (Jian et al., 2024). To maintain its market position, Starbucks must demonstrate that its core competitive advantages: product quality, service quality, and brand strength, justify its premium pricing in the Malaysian market (Dam & Dam, 2021).

Despite the prestigious brand name Starbucks, emerging market trends reveal vulnerabilities in customer retention for the company. First, the rising competition in the food and beverage industry of Malaysia presents consumers with more alternatives than before. Local competitors are now capable of providing the same "Starbucks experience" with better pricing and quality, posing a threat to consumer loyalty to global brands (Jian et al., 2024; Lim, 2022). Secondly, there is an increasing disparity between price and perceived value. Increasing economic pressure has made Malaysian consumers more price-sensitive. Customers want the premium price they pay to be justified by exemplary customer service in order to boost their satisfaction. As noted by Dhisasmito and Kumar (2020), price fairness contributes to customer satisfaction when consumers perceive that they receive reasonable value rather than merely acceptable pricing. It sounds like price fairness is less emphasized than corporate image, but the wording is not precise. Thirdly, maintaining service quality is still challenging, yet it remains a pivotal factor for customer satisfaction in the Malaysian context (Yahui et al., 2023). Although Starbucks focuses on meaningful interactions between customers and baristas, employee turnover and service pressures can sometimes cause service defaults. Current research finds that service-related problems between employees and within organizations have harmed sales in Starbucks Malaysia outlets directly (Pandey et al., 2021). Understanding the interplay between product quality, pricing, service, and brand image is not merely theoretical but essential for business success (Dam & Dam, 2021).

Accordingly, although there is an established amount of literature on customer satisfaction in the food and beverage industry, there nevertheless exists a rationale to revisit such factors in today's post-pandemic era, where price sensitivity and service requirements are different. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to empirically assess the impact of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image on customer satisfaction at Starbucks. This study provides practical insights for coffee shop managers operating in highly competitive markets. By identifying which tangible and intangible dimensions matter most to customers, managers will be better equipped to maximize their offerings and maintain ongoing customer loyalty (Dam & Dam, 2021; Dhisasmito & Kumar, 2020). This study is significant because it applies an integrated framework to assess four determinants of customer satisfaction within the Malaysian context. The findings are particularly relevant to younger consumers, who formed the majority of the sample and may display different value-driven behaviors from older consumer groups. In addition, Asian markets remain underexamined in research on global coffee chains (Jian et al., 2024). Ultimately, this study contributes to the marketing body of knowledge by once again asserting the continued relevance of the

service-profit chain paradigm in the high-end coffee industry (Lim, 2022; Pandey et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background: Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT)

The primary theoretical foundation for this study is the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), which is the dominant framework for understanding customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). This theory posits that satisfaction is the result of a cognitive comparison between a customer's expectations before purchasing a product and their actual perception of performance after consumption (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). In the context of Starbucks, a customer enters with specific expectations regarding product taste, service speed, and brand prestige (Nathalia & Diayuda, 2024). If the actual experience of product quality and service meets or exceeds these expectations, "positive disconfirmation" occurs, leading to satisfaction (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). Conversely, if the performance falls short of these pre-existing standards, "negative disconfirmation" leads to dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980).

Recent studies confirm that variables like service quality and price act as critical performance indicators that customers unconsciously weigh against their expectations to determine their final satisfaction level (Ge et al., 2021; Rukaiyah et al., 2026). Complementing the EDT, this study also draws upon the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to explain consumer behavior (Wongkar et al., 2024). This theory suggests that environmental cues (stimuli) trigger an internal emotional or cognitive state in the consumer, which is the organism (Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). This internal processing then leads to a behavioral outcome or response, such as satisfaction or loyalty (Wongkar et al., 2024).

In this research framework, the independent variables of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image act as the environmental stimuli (Dam & Dam, 2021). The customer's internal evaluation of these factors represents the organism component of the model (Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). Finally, the resulting customer satisfaction serves as the behavioral response to these marketing stimuli (Wongkar et al., 2024).

Hypotheses Development

Product Quality

In the food and beverage industry, product quality is considered the fundamental driver of customer satisfaction and emotional attachment (Deccasari & Hariadi, 2025). Product quality refers to the physical attributes of the offering, including freshness, taste, and presentation (Wongkar et al., 2024). For Starbucks, consistency is critical because customers expect the same taste profile regardless of the location or time of visit (Deccasari & Hariadi, 2025). Product quality, specifically taste and customization options, has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction because it directly fulfills the customer's sensory expectations (Deccasari & Hariadi, 2025). Furthermore, when customers perceive Starbucks' products as high-quality, such as having premium beans and correct temperature, their overall satisfaction increases significantly (Wongkar et al., 2024). Conversely, inconsistency in beverage quality is identified as one of the fastest ways to erode customer trust and satisfaction (Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). Therefore:

H1: Product quality has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Price Fairness

Price fairness is defined as the consumer's assessment of whether the price charged is reasonable and justifiable compared to the value received (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). While

Starbucks is known for premium pricing, customers are willing to pay higher prices if they perceive the price as "fair" in relation to the service and atmosphere provided (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). However, price fairness has become a more sensitive factor in the post-pandemic era due to changing economic conditions (Nathalia & Diayuda, 2024). If customers feel that a price hike does not match the product's value, satisfaction levels drop significantly (Nathalia & Diayuda, 2024). Therefore, price fairness is not just about being cheap, but about the perceived "value for money" that justifies the expenditure (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). Therefore:

H2: Price fairness has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Service Quality

Service quality encompasses the reliability, responsiveness, and empathy provided by the staff during the service encounter (Dam & Dam, 2021). In coffee shops, the interaction between baristas and customers is a primary source of satisfaction and brand connection (Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). Intangible services, such as employee friendliness and the speed of service, directly influence a customer's emotional response to the brand (Dam & Dam, 2021). Even if the coffee product is good, poor service, such as rude staff or long wait times, will lead to immediate dissatisfaction (Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). Thus, excellent service quality is essential for maintaining high customer satisfaction levels in a competitive market (Dam & Dam, 2021). Therefore:

H3: Service quality has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Brand Image

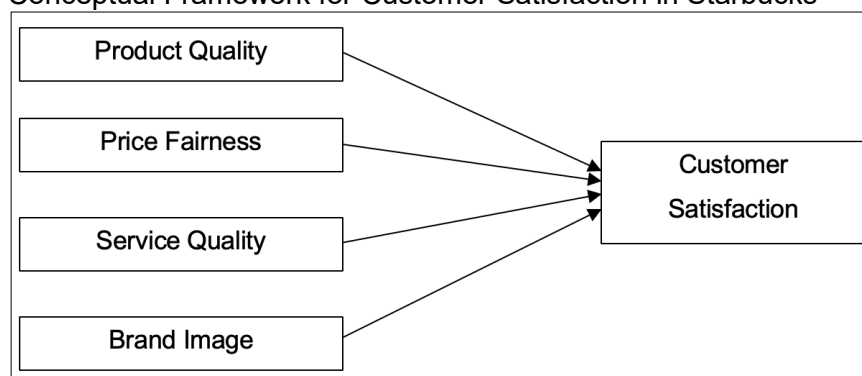
Brand image represents the mental picture and associations customers hold regarding a company (Pandey et al., 2021). A strong, positive brand image can create a "halo effect," where customers are predisposed to be satisfied due to the brand's reputation for excellence (Dam & Dam, 2021). A prestigious brand image, like that of Starbucks, enhances the perceived value of the consumption experience for the customer (Pandey et al., 2021). Customers often feel a sense of social status and satisfaction simply by consuming products from a highly reputable brand (Mahrinasari & Roslina, 2024; Wongkar et al., 2024). Thus, a positive brand image acts as a psychological buffer that enhances overall satisfaction (Pandey et al., 2021). Therefore:

H4: Brand image has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Customer Satisfaction in Starbucks



RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the determinants of customer satisfaction within the coffee chain context. The primary objective is to assess the effects of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image on customer satisfaction. The individual consumer serves as the unit of analysis, as the study focuses on customers' perceptions and evaluations of their consumption experience. A structured questionnaire was employed as the main instrument to collect standardized data suitable for statistical analysis.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises Starbucks customers in Malaysia, particularly individuals who frequently consume coffee at premium coffee chains. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to its practicality and accessibility, allowing the researchers to reach respondents efficiently. The sampling process targeted individuals who had prior experience visiting Starbucks outlets in Malaysia. To ensure the relevance of responses, only participants who had previously purchased from Starbucks were included in the study. As a result, the sample reflects customers who are familiar with the brand and capable of evaluating their experience.

Measurement

All variables in this study, namely product quality, price fairness, service quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction, were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire items were pre-tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and face validity.

Product quality was measured using four items that assess customers' perceptions of beverage taste and consistency, following [Deccasari and Hariadi \(2025\)](#). An example item is, "Starbucks coffee and beverages always taste fresh." Price fairness was evaluated through four items that capture the extent to which customers perceive the price as reasonable relative to the value received, based on [Rukaiyah et al. \(2026\)](#). For example, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with statements such as, "I feel the price I pay is fair for the overall experience I receive."

Service quality was assessed using four items reflecting customers' perceptions of staff reliability and responsiveness, as suggested by [Chan et al. \(2024\)](#). One example item is, "Employees at Starbucks are friendly and courteous." Brand image was measured using four items that capture perceptions of the brand's reputation and prestige, following [Pandey et al. \(2021\)](#), including statements such as, "I see Starbucks as a premium and reliable brand." Finally, customer satisfaction was measured using four items that reflect the overall sense of fulfillment experienced by customers after their visit, based on [Wongkar et al. \(2024\)](#), with items such as "Starbucks meets my expectations for a coffee shop."

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. This method was selected due to its efficiency in collecting quantitative data and its wide accessibility to respondents. The questionnaire was disseminated through various digital platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and email networks, enabling broader reach among potential participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Several statistical techniques were employed to examine the relationships among variables. Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Pearson correlation analysis was used to evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between variables. In addition, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relative influence of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image on customer satisfaction, as well as to test the proposed hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographic Information (N=200)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Below 18 years old	64	32.0
18-25 years old	85	42.5
26-35 years old	30	15.0
36-45 years old	13	6.5
Above 45 years old	8	4.0
Gender		
Male	79	39.5
Female	121	60.5
Employment Status		
Government sector	19	9.5
Private sector	53	26.5
Self-employed	27	13.5
Student	76	38.0
Unemployed	25	12.5
Education Level		
Primary School	13	6.5
Secondary School	33	16.5
Diploma	43	21.5
Bachelor's Degree	73	36.5
Master's Degree	12	6.0
PhD	26	13.0
Frequency of Visiting Starbucks		
Almost every day	16	8.0
Once a week	82	41.0
2-3 times a week	37	18.5
Once a month	46	23.0
Rarely	19	9.5

Table 1 shows that 39.5% of respondents were male and 60.5% were female. The majority of respondents (42.5%) were aged between 18 and 25 years, while only 4.0% were above 45 years old. In terms of employment status, students represented the largest group (38.0%), followed by private sector employees (26.5%). The smallest group was respondents from the government sector (9.5%). Regarding education level, most respondents (36.5%) held a bachelor's degree. In terms of visitation frequency, 41.0% of respondents reported visiting Starbucks once a week, indicating a relatively strong pattern of regular consumption.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1 Product Quality	0.777				
2 Price Fairness	0.708**	0.727			
3 Service Quality	0.728**	0.660**	0.732		
4 Brand Image	0.685**	0.635**	0.657**	0.753	
5 Customer Satisfaction	0.691**	0.704**	0.680**	0.678**	0.731
Number of items	4	4	4	4	4
Mean	4.440	4.194	4.164	4.193	4.173
Standard Deviation	0.572	0.558	0.524	0.563	0.559

Note: N=200; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The bold diagonal entries represent Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.

The results in Table 2 indicate that the Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the five variables shows good reliability, with alpha coefficients ranging between 0.727 and 0.777, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). This means the items used to measure each variable demonstrate high levels of reliability. In terms of customer perceptions, product quality emerged as the highest-rated attribute with a mean value of 4.44 and standard deviation of 0.572, suggesting that the taste and consistency of Starbucks beverages are the primary strengths of the brand. This was followed by price fairness (Mean = 4.19) and brand image (Mean = 4.19). Service quality received the lowest rating (Mean = 4.16), although it still reflects a generally positive agreement level among customers. The Pearson Correlation analysis reveals strong, positive relationships between all four independent variables and customer satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). Notably, Price fairness showed the strongest correlation ($r = 0.704^{**}$), indicating that customer satisfaction is most tightly linked to perceived value for money. This was closely followed by product quality ($r = 0.691^{**}$) and service quality ($r = 0.680^{**}$).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Variables	Customer Satisfaction
1 Product Quality	0.167*
2 Price Fairness	0.299***
3 Service Quality	0.203**
4 Brand Image	0.240***
R ²	0.627
F value	81.968
Durbin-Watson Statistic	2.053

Note: N=200; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Standardized coefficients, Beta, are reported.

The regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed hypotheses as it examined the effect of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image variables on customer satisfaction. The model summary in Table 3 indicates a robust fit, with an R² value of 0.627. This means that 62.7% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by the four factors in this study. The F-value of 81.968*** ($p < 0.001$) confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. The findings reveal that all four independent variables are significant predictors of satisfaction. Price fairness was identified as the most influential factor ($\beta = 0.299^{***}$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that in the current market, customers prioritize value for money above all else. Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. Brand image was the second most significant driver ($\beta = 0.240^{***}$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing the idea that the prestige of the Starbucks brand plays a major role in customer retention. Thus, hypothesis 4 is supported. Furthermore, service quality showed a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.203^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), proving that friendly and efficient staff are crucial for a satisfying experience. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported. Finally, product quality, while still significant, had the lowest impact among the four

variables ($\beta=0.167^*$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. This suggests that while good coffee is expected, pricing and brand experience currently differentiate satisfaction levels more strongly. Based on these results, Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 are all supported.

DISCUSSION

This research explores what truly drives customer satisfaction by considering four major independent variables: product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image. Through an investigation of these variables and how they jointly influence customer satisfaction, this paper seeks to discern which variables are driving greater levels of consumer satisfaction. As hypothesized, all four variables were found to have a positive and significant effect. In order of impact, price fairness has the greatest effect ($\beta = 0.299^{***}$), followed by brand image ($\beta = 0.240^{***}$) and service quality ($\beta = 0.203^{**}$). Even product quality, while having the lowest beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.167^*$), remained a statistically significant predictor. Additionally, the overall analysis model is strong, with an R^2 of 0.627, suggesting that these four variables explain 62.7% of the variance in consumer satisfaction levels, which is very high in consumer behavior literature.

The Importance of Product Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The value of Cronbach's Alpha reliability on this measure is 0.777, indicating it has strong reliability. Product quality has a strong but moderate beta value of 0.167, with $p < 0.05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported. This verifies that if customers feel the quality of the beverages offered by Starbucks is high, it leads to increased satisfaction in general. From the descriptive statistics, it was found that product quality scored the highest with an impressive mean of 4.44/5.00. This verifies that customers demand nothing but excellent coffee from Starbucks; at the same time, this has become the norm without differentiating much between the three: price, quality, or service. This finding supports EDT by suggesting that product quality may function less as a differentiator than price or service, because high quality is already expected by customers (Ramasamy et al., 2024). Moreover, its unique characteristics, differentiating it from competitors, are still difficult to replicate in terms of taste and preparation (Crimson Cup, 2025). For the 41% of customers who visit weekly, specific sensory cues like aroma and balanced flavor are critical antecedents to satisfaction. Thus, product excellence remains the foundation of the Starbucks value proposition (Artuđer et al., 2024).

The Influence of Price Fairness on Customer Satisfaction

Price fairness is the best predictive factor of satisfaction. It is significant because of its very low p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$), along with the highest beta of 0.299. It is evident that the perception of receiving a fair price is the key determinant of satisfaction for present-day Malaysian customers. Hence, Hypothesis 2 is strongly supported. It is indeed surprising to note that while Starbucks is known for premium pricing, and the main demographic of this study comprises students (38.0%), they still perceive the price as fair. This finding is backed by the concept of "Perceived Value," where customers do not judge the price in isolation but in the context of the benefits derived (Kuek et al., 2025; Setiawan & Lestari, 2025). The findings suggest that customers may evaluate Starbucks' pricing not only in relation to the product itself, but also in relation to the broader experience associated with the brand, which includes both tangible and intangible benefits associated with the brand, as highlighted in prior studies (Rukaiyah et al., 2026). Recent research confirms that the physical and social setting, often referred to as the "social service scape," plays a critical role in justifying higher prices (Artuđer et al., 2024). When the physical environment and social signaling align with the brand's promise, customers perceive the higher price point as equitable. Consequently, cost-effectiveness in this context is redefined, and customers experience utility not only

through their high-quality services but also through increased personal values (Nathalia & Diayuda, 2024).

The Influence of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

Although service quality is sometimes assumed to be less central in increasingly digital service settings, the present findings show that it remains a significant determinant of customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.203^{**}$, $p = 0.004$). This finding rejects the null hypothesis and provides robust support for Hypothesis 3, aligning with the general Malaysian F&B industry perception that service responsiveness is essential for customer retention (Chan et al., 2024; Jian et al., 2024). This finding also verifies the importance of the human factor in the service process. Despite the increasing popularity of digital ordering, customer interactions with service staff, involving their amiability, efficacy, and problem-solving attitude, remain core to the customer experience (Pérez-Morón et al., 2022). Research by Dam & Dam (2021) and Rizal et al. (2023) has found that customer service assurances and empathy have been direct precursors to the emotional experience of the customer. Capable and caring service staff build trust and increase customer satisfaction, contributing to the importance of service consistency for customer repeat business (Kuek et al., 2025). Therefore, while price and brand image draw customers in, it is the consistency of service execution that ensures their visit is satisfying enough to warrant a return.

The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Satisfaction

Brand image is also important for satisfaction, as it has a Beta value of 0.240 and is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Although slightly behind price fairness for this data, it is the second most important variable. Hypothesis 4 is also strongly supported. Given that 74.5% of the sample was under 25 years old, the findings may reflect the preferences of younger consumers, for whom brand image may carry additional symbolic value, particularly among younger consumers, consistent with literature suggesting that branded consumption can reflect status-related and identity-related meanings. For these consumers, brand consumption may also carry symbolic meaning beyond the functional attributes of the product that generates intrinsic satisfaction (Rizal et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the strong correlation found between brand image and customer satisfaction ($r=0.678$) indicates the presence of a "Halo Effect." A robust brand reputation creates a psychological buffer where customers are more likely to perceive their overall experience positively, even if minor service or product issues arise (Pandey et al., 2021). Brand image is thus crucial to Starbucks' success because, through its reputation, Starbucks is able to engender trust, and trust correlates to future purchasing intent (Tarigan & Bernarto, 2024; Wongkar et al., 2024). Consequently, the brand's prestige acts as a quality signal that reassures customers they have made the "right" choice, thereby enhancing their post-purchase satisfaction (Dam & Dam, 2021; Kuek et al., 2025).

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for practitioners in the coffee chain industry, particularly for Starbucks management in Malaysia. First, given that price fairness emerged as the most influential determinant of customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.299^{***}$), managers should prioritize strategies that enhance customers' perceptions of value. While maintaining a premium positioning, Starbucks must clearly communicate the benefits associated with its pricing. This may include offering bundled promotions, enhanced loyalty reward programs, or time-based promotional strategies such as "Happy Hour" initiatives. In addition, marketing efforts should reinforce the concept of "affordable luxury" by emphasizing the experiential value of the "Third Place,"

including comfortable ambience, accessibility, and complementary services such as Wi-Fi, which collectively justify the price paid by customers.

Second, brand image remains a critical driver of satisfaction ($\beta = 0.240^{***}$), indicating the importance of maintaining a strong and contemporary brand identity. Starbucks should continue to invest in branding strategies that reinforce its association with modernity, global connectivity, and lifestyle positioning. For younger consumers, who form a significant portion of the sample, brand perception plays an important role in shaping satisfaction through psychological and symbolic value. Strategic collaborations with digital influencers and the introduction of limited-edition products or merchandise can help sustain brand relevance and engagement among this segment (Nair et al., 2021).

Third, service quality also demonstrates a significant impact on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.203^{**}$), highlighting the continued importance of human interaction in the service experience. Despite the growing adoption of digital technologies, managers should avoid over-reliance on automation at the expense of customer engagement. Instead, emphasis should be placed on employee training programs that enhance responsiveness, empathy, and personalization. Simple practices such as addressing customers by name and offering tailored recommendations can contribute meaningfully to the overall customer experience.

Finally, although product quality has the lowest relative impact among the examined variables ($\beta = 0.167^*$), it remains a fundamental requirement and a non-negotiable baseline for customer satisfaction. Managers must ensure strict adherence to standard operating procedures (SOPs) to maintain consistency in taste, presentation, and product standards across outlets. Any decline in product quality may undermine customer trust and weaken the effectiveness of other strategic initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the determinants of customer satisfaction among coffee chain customers in Malaysia, with Starbucks serving as the empirical context by assessing the effects of product quality, price fairness, service quality, and brand image. The findings provide empirical evidence on how these factors collectively influence customer satisfaction within the coffee chain context.

The results indicate that all four variables significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction, with price fairness emerging as the most influential predictor, followed by brand image, service quality, and product quality. This suggests that customer satisfaction is driven more strongly by perceived value and brand-related attributes than by product attributes alone. Notably, although product quality remains important, it plays a comparatively lesser role, indicating that high product standards may be perceived as a basic expectation rather than a key differentiator. Furthermore, the findings highlight that service quality continues to play a meaningful role, emphasizing that human interaction remains relevant even in an increasingly digital service environment.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that coffee chain operators should prioritize value-based strategies that enhance customers' perceptions of price fairness while simultaneously reinforcing brand image and maintaining consistent service quality. Ensuring that customers perceive a balanced exchange between price and overall experience is critical for sustaining satisfaction, particularly among younger consumers who formed the majority of the sample.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing updated empirical evidence on customer satisfaction determinants in the post-pandemic coffee industry, particularly within the Malaysian context. By integrating product-related and experiential factors within a single framework, the study reinforces the importance of perceived value and brand positioning in shaping customer satisfaction, while also confirming the continued relevance of service quality in contemporary consumer behavior.

LIMITATION

Despite providing valuable insights, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample is characterized by a demographic imbalance, as 74.5% of respondents are aged 25 years and below, with students representing the largest proportion (38.0%). As a result, the findings may primarily reflect the perceptions of younger consumers and may not fully represent the broader population of Starbucks customers in Malaysia. Different age groups and income levels may evaluate factors such as price fairness, service quality, and brand image differently.

Second, this study adopts a cross-sectional research design, capturing customer perceptions at a single point in time. Consequently, it does not account for potential changes in consumer behavior over time, particularly in response to evolving economic conditions, lifestyle changes, or shifts in consumer preferences. A longitudinal approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these determinants influence satisfaction over time.

Third, the data were collected using a non-probability (convenience) sampling method through online distribution, which may introduce selection bias. Respondents who are more active on digital platforms or more engaged with the brand may be overrepresented, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Finally, the study focuses exclusively on Starbucks customers within Malaysia, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other geographical or cultural contexts. Consumer perceptions of value, service, and brand image may differ across countries or between urban and rural settings due to variations in cultural norms, economic conditions, and market structures.

In light of these limitations, several directions for future research are suggested. First, future studies could replicate this model using a more diverse and balanced sample, particularly including older and higher-income consumer groups, to enhance generalizability. Second, longitudinal research designs are recommended to examine how customer satisfaction evolves over time under changing market conditions. Third, future research could incorporate additional variables such as digital convenience or mobile ordering services to better reflect the increasing role of technology in customer experience. Finally, qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, may provide deeper insights into the underlying reasons why consumers perceive premium pricing as fair, particularly in relation to brand image and experiential value.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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