

From Local Adaptation to Global Acceptance: Customer Engagement, Brand Loyalty, and Menu Localization

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Jian, O. Z., Pandey, R., Mazzuan, N. A. M., critical strategy for enhancing cultural Sahu, A. K., Yusra, N. A. H., Halim, N. A. A., relevance and consumer acceptance in ..., & Kee, D. M. H. (2025). From local international markets. This study aims to adaptation to global acceptance: Customer examine how customer engagement and engagement, brand loyalty, and menu brand loyalty influence acceptance of localization. *International Journal of localized menu strategies in the context of Tourism and Hospitality in Asia Pasific*, Marrybrown Malaysia's global expansion. A quantitative research design was employed, using data collected from 151 Malaysian consumers through a structured self-administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that customer engagement has a significant and positive effect on menu localization acceptance ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.05$), while brand loyalty also demonstrates a positive but comparatively weaker influence ($\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.05$). Together, both variables explain 34.9% of the variance in menu localization acceptance ($R^2 = 0.349$). These findings suggest that active interaction with the brand and emotional attachment play an important role in shaping consumer openness toward culturally adapted menu offerings. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on Malaysian fast-food brands and provides practical insights for managers to strengthen digital engagement and leverage loyal customers when implementing international localization strategies.

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The increasing globalization of the fast-food industry has intensified the need for brands to balance standardized operations with sensitivity to local market preferences. Menu localization has therefore become a critical strategy for enhancing cultural relevance and consumer acceptance in international markets. This study aims to examine how customer engagement and brand loyalty influence acceptance of localized menu strategies in the context of Marrybrown Malaysia's global expansion. A quantitative research design was employed, using data collected from 151 Malaysian consumers through a structured self-administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that customer engagement has a significant and positive effect on menu localization acceptance ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.05$), while brand loyalty also demonstrates a positive but comparatively weaker influence ($\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.05$). Together, both variables explain 34.9% of the variance in menu localization acceptance ($R^2 = 0.349$). These findings suggest that active interaction with the brand and emotional attachment play an important role in shaping consumer openness toward culturally adapted menu offerings. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on Malaysian fast-food brands and provides practical insights for managers to strengthen digital engagement and leverage loyal customers when implementing international localization strategies.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Cultural Adaptation; Customer Engagement; Global Expansion; Menu Localization

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global food service industry operates within an environment marked by intense competition, cultural diversity, and rapidly evolving consumer expectations. As fast-food chains expand beyond their domestic markets, they face increasing pressure to balance operational standardization with sensitivity to local consumer preferences. While standardized processes enable cost efficiency and brand consistency, excessive uniformity may limit market relevance in culturally diverse regions. Consequently, menu localization has emerged as a strategic approach that allows fast-food brands to adapt product offerings to local tastes, dietary practices, and cultural norms while maintaining a recognizable global identity (Ali & Santos, 2025). Such adaptation has become essential for enhancing customer acceptance, strengthening cultural relevance, and improving market penetration across international markets.

Beyond product adaptation, the interaction between fast-food firms and consumers has been fundamentally reshaped by digital transformation. The rise of digital platforms, mobile applications, and loyalty programs has altered how customers engage with brands, extending engagement beyond physical outlets to continuous online interactions. Prior studies indicate that digital engagement and loyalty mechanisms significantly influence consumer satisfaction, trust, and continuance intention within service industries, including the fast-food sector (Kee et al., 2025; Kee, Ho et al., 2021; Ng & Kee, 2025; Oh et al., 2021). Through interactive content, gamified promotions, and loyalty-based incentives, fast-food brands can deepen consumer involvement, foster emotional attachment, and encourage repeated interactions. These engagement-driven strategies play a critical role in shaping consumer openness toward new offerings, including culturally adapted menu items.

In the context of emerging-market brands, Malaysia's leading homegrown fast-food chain, Marrybrown, provides a relevant and underexplored case. As Marrybrown seeks to expand its international footprint, the brand faces the dual challenge of preserving its local flavor identity while competing against established global players. Existing research suggests that relying solely on local specialty or cultural uniqueness is insufficient to achieve sustained international recognition without a structured and strategic approach (Kee, Anwar et al., 2023; Kee, Liem et al., 2023; Ng & Kee, 2025; Ng et al., 2025; Vaziri et al., 2023). Global fast-food leaders such as McDonald's and KFC have demonstrated that successful international growth often stems from the integration of localized menu strategies with strong customer engagement and loyalty systems. These brands leverage digital platforms and culturally tailored offerings to strengthen consumer acceptance while reinforcing global brand equity.

Despite the growing body of research on digital engagement and gamified loyalty systems, most empirical studies have concentrated on Western multinational corporations or e-commerce contexts (De Canio et al., 2021; Surira et al., 2025). As a result, limited attention has been given to how local fast-food brands from Southeast Asia can strategically combine customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization to support global expansion. In particular, the role of engagement-driven and loyalty-based mechanisms in facilitating acceptance of localized menu strategies remains underexplored within the fast-food industry.

In response to this gap, this study aims to examine how customer engagement and brand loyalty influence consumer acceptance of menu localization strategies within the context of international fast-food expansion, using a Malaysian brand as the empirical setting. The significance of this research lies in its focus on the consumer side of localization, offering insights into how customers evaluate and respond to culturally adapted menu offerings in global markets. The novelty of the study resides in its integrated framework,

which moves beyond viewing menu localization solely as a firm-driven strategic decision and instead conceptualizes localization acceptance as a consumer-driven outcome shaped by relational factors. Specifically, this study contributes to the international fast-food and branding literature in three ways. First, it extends localization research by repositioning menu localization acceptance as a key dependent construct, emphasizing consumer response rather than managerial intent. Second, it empirically differentiates the roles of customer engagement and brand loyalty, demonstrating that active engagement exerts a stronger and more immediate influence on localization acceptance than loyalty alone, thereby refining relationship marketing perspectives in service contexts. Third, by focusing on a Malaysian fast-food brand, this study broadens the empirical scope of localization research, which has largely been dominated by Western multinational corporations. Collectively, the findings provide theoretical advancement and practical direction for fast-food firms seeking to balance global brand consistency with local cultural relevance in international markets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As fast-food brands expand beyond their domestic markets, the ability to balance global standardization with local responsiveness has become increasingly critical. In culturally diverse regions, consumer acceptance is shaped not only by product quality but also by how well brands align their offerings with local values, dietary practices, and communication styles (Ajetunmobi & Laobangdisa, 2024). Prior studies emphasize that international food service firms must move beyond uniform strategies and adopt culturally adaptive approaches to remain competitive and relevant in global markets (Cao et al., 2024; Fang, 2025). This strategic orientation is particularly important for fast-food brands operating in emerging and multicultural markets, where consumer expectations are strongly influenced by local traditions and social norms.

Within this context, menu localization has emerged as a key mechanism through which brands translate cultural understanding into tangible offerings. Menu localization enables firms to incorporate local flavors, ingredients, and consumption patterns while preserving core brand identity (Ragesh et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of such localization strategies does not rely solely on product adaptation. Instead, it is closely linked to how consumers engage with brands and the degree of loyalty they develop over time. Digital interaction, promotional engagement, and culturally aligned communication play an important role in shaping consumer perceptions and responses toward localized menus (Zhang et al., 2024).

Existing literature further suggests that customer engagement and brand loyalty function as critical relational mechanisms that influence consumer acceptance of culturally adapted strategies (Majeed et al., 2025; Rasool et al., 2021; Smith, 2023). Engaged customers are more likely to participate in brand interactions and show openness toward localized innovations, while loyal customers tend to support brand initiatives due to emotional attachment and trust (Cardoso et al., 2022). Despite this, empirical research that jointly examines customer engagement, cultural adaptation, and menu localization remains limited, particularly within the context of fast-food brands from emerging markets.

Accordingly, the following sections develop hypotheses that explain how customer engagement and cultural adaptation contribute to menu localization and brand loyalty, forming the theoretical foundation of this study.

Hypotheses Development

Customer Engagement and Menu Localization

Menu localization refers to the strategic adaptation of international fast-food offerings through glocalization, a process that balances global brand consistency with responsiveness to local tastes, cultural values, and consumption habits (Ali & Santos, 2025). This approach allows multinational brands to maintain standardized operations while responding to culturally specific expectations. Fang (2025) explains that effective menu localization enables brands to establish emotional connections with consumers and sustain market relevance in culturally diverse environments. By aligning menu offerings with local preferences, brands can increase acceptance and perceived relevance among consumers.

Cultural sensitivity embedded within menu localization plays a critical role in shaping customer responses (Ali & Santos, 2025). When food products reflect local culinary traditions and social norms, consumers are more likely to perceive the brand as respectful and attentive to their cultural identity. Cao et al. (2024) highlight that such alignment enhances emotional attachment and strengthens brand differentiation in global food service markets. This attachment often encourages customers to engage more actively with the brand, including participating in promotional activities, providing feedback, and exploring new localized offerings.

Customer engagement further supports the success of menu localization strategies (Ali & Santos, 2025; Thomas-Francois et al., 2021). Engaged consumers, those who interact frequently with digital content, online promotions, and brand communications, tend to develop stronger familiarity and involvement with the brand. Advances in digital technology have amplified this effect. Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrate that natural language processing (NLP) improves menu translation accuracy by integrating culture-specific expressions with established translation theories, thereby reducing misinterpretation and improving consumer understanding. Digital platforms thus serve as important channels through which engagement enhances acceptance of localized menus.

Empirical evidence from global fast-food brands supports this relationship. McDonald's, for example, has successfully localized its menus by offering vegetarian options in India and introducing region-specific flavors in other markets, enabling a balance between global consistency and local responsiveness (Ragesh et al., 2025). These initiatives demonstrate that consumers who are actively engaged with a brand are more receptive to culturally adapted menu strategies. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Customer engagement positively influences menu localization.

Brand Loyalty and Menu Localization Acceptance

Brand loyalty represents a consumer's sustained preference, trust, and psychological commitment toward a brand, which strongly influences how strategic initiatives introduced by the brand are evaluated and accepted (Hadikusumo, 2025; Majeed et al., 2025). In international fast-food settings, menu localization often involves culturally adapted products that differ from standardized offerings. The acceptance of such adaptations depends not only on cultural relevance but also on the degree of confidence consumers place in the brand's intentions and decision-making.

Cultural adaptation, as discussed by Li et al. (2025) and Tewari et al. (2024), extends beyond surface-level menu adjustments to encompass alignment with local values, symbols, and consumption practices. While these studies emphasize adaptation as a strategic approach, their implications suggest that consumers who already hold

favorable brand perceptions are better positioned to interpret localization efforts positively. In this sense, brand loyalty serves as a cognitive and emotional filter through which localized menu strategies are assessed. Loyal customers are more likely to perceive culturally adapted offerings as meaningful enhancements rather than inconsistent deviations.

Prior studies indicate that brand loyalty reduces perceived risk associated with unfamiliar or newly introduced products, thereby increasing consumers' willingness to support localized menu initiatives (Akolkar et al., 2024). When loyalty is well established, customers tend to trust that localization decisions are made to improve relevance and inclusivity, which strengthens acceptance of menu adaptations across diverse cultural contexts. This is particularly important in highly competitive fast-food markets, where consumers are frequently exposed to alternative brands and standardized global menus. Evidence from global fast-food brands further reinforces this argument. McDonald's success in culturally diverse markets, such as India, illustrates how loyal customers are more receptive to localized menu items, such as vegetarian alternatives and culturally themed products, because of their existing trust in the brand (Khan & Siddiqui, 2025). Similarly, Malaysian fast-food chains such as Marrybrown benefit from a loyal customer base that is more inclined to endorse localized menu strategies when entering regional and international markets. In this context, brand loyalty functions as a facilitating mechanism that enhances consumer acceptance of menu localization efforts rather than merely an outcome of cultural adaptation (Majeed et al., 2025).

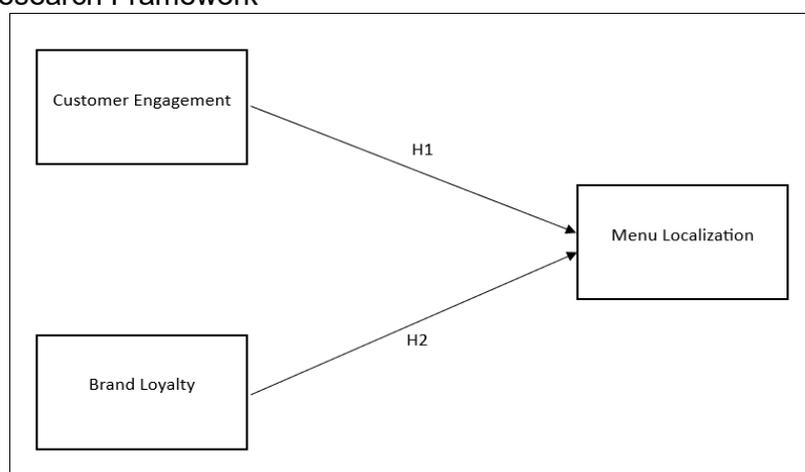
Accordingly, brand loyalty is expected to play a direct role in shaping consumers' acceptance of localized menu offerings introduced by fast-food brands operating across borders. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand loyalty positively influences menu localization acceptance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 1. The framework illustrates the relationships between customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization. It proposes that customers who are more actively engaged with a fast-food brand and who exhibit stronger emotional loyalty are more likely to accept and support culturally adapted menu offerings. By integrating engagement and loyalty perspectives, the framework explains how relational and behavioral factors jointly contribute to the effectiveness of menu localization strategies in the global fast-food industry.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The target population of this study comprises Malaysian consumers who have previously visited or dined at Marrybrown. Due to practical constraints related to time and accessibility, a non-probability convenience sampling approach was adopted. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire created using Google Forms. The survey link was circulated through commonly used social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram, to reach respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds.

A total of 151 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis after data screening. This sample size is considered appropriate for regression-based analysis in exploratory consumer research. The collected data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics to examine the relationships among customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization acceptance.

Measurement Instruments

The survey instrument consisted of structured sections designed to measure customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization. All measurement items were adapted from prior empirical studies within the fast-food and service management literature to ensure conceptual relevance and content validity (Kee, Toh et al., 2021; Oh et al., 2021). Minor wording adjustments were made to suit the Marrybrown context while preserving the original construct meanings.

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), allowing respondents to express the degree of their agreement with each statement.

Pilot Study and Reliability Assessment

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess item clarity and internal consistency. The results indicated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 across all constructs. Based on these outcomes, no items were removed, and the instrument was deemed suitable for full-scale administration.

Construct Operationalization

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement was measured using five items that capture the extent to which consumers interact with Marrybrown through digital platforms, promotional activities, and brand-related content. These items reflect levels of interest, participation, and enjoyment associated with the brand's online and interactive initiatives. A sample item is: "I enjoy participating in Marrybrown's online promotions or activities."

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty was assessed using five items that reflect consumers' commitment, preference, and intention to repurchase Marrybrown products in comparison with other fast-food brands. These items capture emotional attachment and behavioral intention. An example statement is: "I consider Marrybrown as one of my preferred fast-food brands."

Menu Localization

Menu localization was measured with five items designed to evaluate consumers' perceptions of Marrybrown's efforts to adapt its menu offerings to local cultural tastes and preferences in different markets. The items assess acceptance and support for culturally adjusted menu strategies. A representative item is: "Marrybrown should adapt its menu to reflect the culture of each country it operates in."

RESULTS**Table 1.** Summary of Respondent's Demography (N=151)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	69	45.7
Female	82	54.3
Age		
18 – 24 years old	68	45.0
25 – 34 years old	37	24.7
35 – 44 years old	24	15.9
45 and above	22	14.6
Frequency of Visiting Marrybrown		
Frequently (weekly)	23	15.2
Never	19	12.6
Occasionally (once a month)	38	25.2
Rarely (1-2 times a year)	71	47.0
Most Visiting Fast-Food		
Burger King	2	1.3
Common local store	1	0.7
D' AFC	1	0.7
Does not like	1	0.7
KFC	45	29.8
Marrybrown	36	23.8
McDonald's	57	37.7
Richeese Factory	1	0.7
Richeese	1	0.7
Texas	4	2.6
Texas Chicken	2	1.3

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 151 respondents who participated in this study. The age composition of the sample shows a clear concentration among younger consumers. Respondents aged between 18 and 24 years represent the largest segment of the sample (N = 68, 45.0%), indicating that young adults form the dominant consumer group in this dataset. This group is followed by individuals aged 25–34 years (N = 37, 24.7%), suggesting a substantial presence of early-career adults. Smaller proportions of respondents fall within the 35–44 age group (N = 24, 15.9%) and those aged 45 years and above (N = 22, 14.6%). The distribution implies that the study largely captures perceptions from younger and middle-aged consumers, who are often more exposed to digital engagement initiatives and promotional activities in the fast-food sector.

In terms of gender composition, the sample demonstrates a relatively balanced distribution, with female respondents accounting for a slightly higher share (N = 82, 54.3%) compared to male respondents (N = 69, 45.7%). This near-equilibrium in gender representation helps to reduce gender bias and supports the generalizability of the findings across male and female consumer groups.

Regarding visit frequency, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they visit Marrybrown infrequently, defined as one to two times per year (N = 71, 47.0%). This suggests that a considerable portion of the sample consists of occasional or low-involvement customers rather than habitual patrons. The second largest group comprises respondents who reported visiting Marrybrown approximately once a month (N = 38, 25.2%), reflecting moderate engagement with the brand. A smaller segment of respondents reported frequent weekly visits (N = 23, 15.2%), while a minority indicated that they have never visited Marrybrown (N = 19, 12.6%). This variation in visit frequency provides a broad perspective on consumer engagement levels, ranging from non-users to regular customers.

With respect to fast-food brand preference, McDonald’s emerged as the most frequently visited brand among respondents (N = 57, 37.7%), followed by KFC (N = 45, 29.8%). Marrybrown ranked third, with 36 respondents (23.8%) identifying it as their most visited fast-food outlet. Only a small proportion of respondents reported visiting Texas Chicken (including Texas) (N = 6, 4.0%), Burger King and Richeese Factory (including Richeese) (N = 2, 1.3%), or other outlets such as local stores, D’AFC, or expressing no clear preference, each accounting for 0.7% of the sample. This distribution highlights the competitive landscape in which Marrybrown operates, particularly against established multinational fast-food brands.

Overall, the demographic profile reflects a predominantly young consumer base with varied levels of brand engagement and diverse fast-food preferences. This composition offers a suitable empirical context for examining how customer engagement and brand loyalty relate to the acceptance of menu localization strategies within Marrybrown, particularly among consumers who are familiar with both local and international fast-food brands.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha, and Zero-Order Correlations for All Study Variables

Determinants of Menu Localization Acceptance				
Variables		1	2	3
1	Customer Engagement	0.894		
2	Brand Loyalty	0.805**	0.965	
3	Menu Localization	0.578**	0.537**	0.920
Number of Items		5	5	5
Mean		3.3404	3.0464	4.0477
Standard Deviation		0.86156	1.13383	0.79823

Note: N = 151; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha.

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics, internal consistency estimates, and zero-order correlations for the key constructs examined in this study, namely customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization acceptance. The reliability analysis demonstrates a high degree of internal consistency across all measurement scales. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha values range from 0.894 to 0.965, which comfortably exceed the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.70. These results indicate that the items used to operationalize each construct are consistent and suitable for further statistical analysis.

An examination of the descriptive statistics shows that menu localization acceptance records the highest mean score (M = 4.0477, SD = 0.79823). This suggests that respondents generally hold favorable views toward Marrybrown’s efforts to adapt its menu to local tastes and cultural preferences. In contrast, customer engagement

displays a moderate mean value ($M = 3.3404$, $SD = 0.86156$), indicating a reasonable but not yet optimal level of interaction between consumers and the brand. Similarly, brand loyalty registers a moderate average score ($M = 3.0464$, $SD = 1.13383$), reflecting varying degrees of commitment and repeat patronage among respondents. Taken together, these findings imply that while menu localization is well received, there remains potential for Marrybrown to further strengthen engagement and loyalty initiatives.

The correlation analysis reveals statistically significant and positive relationships among all study variables. Customer engagement exhibits a strong association with brand loyalty ($r = 0.805$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that consumers who interact more actively with Marrybrown tend to develop stronger emotional attachment and commitment to the brand. Furthermore, customer engagement shows a moderate positive relationship with menu localization acceptance ($r = 0.578$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that engaged customers are more receptive to culturally adapted menu offerings. Brand loyalty is also moderately and positively correlated with menu localization acceptance ($r = 0.537$, $p < 0.01$), implying that loyal customers are more inclined to support and accept menu localization strategies.

Overall, the pattern of correlations aligns with the theoretical expectations proposed in this study. The observed relationships among customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization acceptance provide preliminary empirical evidence supporting the hypothesized links and offer a strong rationale for proceeding with multiple regression analysis to formally test the study's hypotheses.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Determinants of Menu Localization Acceptance				
Variables		Beta	t-value	p-value
1	Customer Engagement	0.414	3.700	0.038
2	Brand Loyalty	0.203	1.818	0.047
Model Summary				
R ²		0.349		
F- value		39.162		

Note: $N = 151$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 presents the outcomes of the multiple regression analysis conducted to assess the influence of customer engagement and brand loyalty on menu localization acceptance at Marrybrown. The regression model demonstrates statistical significance, with an R^2 value of 0.349 and an F-statistic of 39.162. These results indicate that approximately 34.9% of the variation in consumers' acceptance of localized menu offerings can be explained by the combined effects of customer engagement and brand loyalty. This level of explanatory power suggests that relational and attitudinal factors play an important role in shaping customer responses toward menu adaptation strategies.

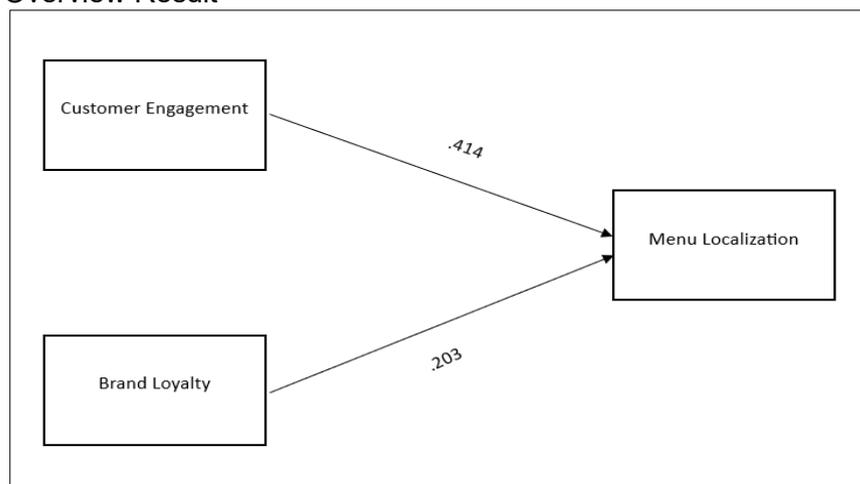
Customer engagement is found to exert a positive and statistically significant effect on menu localization acceptance ($\beta = 0.414$, $t = 3.700$, $p = 0.038 < 0.05$), thereby providing empirical support for H1. This finding implies that consumers who interact more actively with Marrybrown, through digital platforms, promotional campaigns, and various brand touchpoints, are more likely to view localized menu offerings favorably. Increased engagement appears to strengthen customers' familiarity with the brand, which in turn enhances their willingness to accept menu modifications that reflect local tastes, cultural norms, and consumption patterns.

Brand loyalty also shows a positive and statistically significant relationship with menu localization acceptance ($\beta = 0.203$, $t = 1.818$, $p = 0.047 < 0.05$), supporting H2. This result suggests that customers who demonstrate higher levels of commitment and attachment to Marrybrown are more inclined to trust the brand's strategic decisions, including the introduction of culturally adapted menu items. Loyal customers are therefore more likely to interpret menu localization as a natural extension of the brand's identity rather than a deviation from its core values.

When comparing the relative effects of the two predictors, customer engagement emerges as the more influential determinant of menu localization acceptance, while brand loyalty plays a secondary yet meaningful role. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of cultivating both active customer engagement and sustained brand loyalty to encourage consumer acceptance of menu localization initiatives. For Marrybrown, strengthening interactive engagement channels alongside long-term loyalty-building efforts may enhance the effectiveness of its localization strategies in both domestic and international markets.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the study's results by summarizing the relationships among customer engagement, brand loyalty, and menu localization acceptance based on the empirical analysis.

Figure 2. Overview Result



DISCUSSION

This study investigates Marrybrown Malaysia's international expansion strategy by examining the roles of customer engagement and brand loyalty in shaping acceptance of menu localization initiatives. By integrating relational and cultural perspectives, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how multinational fast-food brands can enhance consumer acceptance and sustain competitiveness across diverse markets.

The Influence of Customer Engagement on Menu Localization (H1)

The empirical results provide strong support for H1, demonstrating that customer engagement has a significant and positive effect on menu localization acceptance. As indicated in Table 3, customer engagement shows the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that consumers who are more actively involved with the brand are more inclined to accept culturally adapted menu offerings.

This finding highlights the strategic importance of engagement-driven interactions, particularly through digital platforms, promotional activities, and experiential brand touchpoints. Engaged customers tend to develop a stronger psychological connection with the brand, which increases their openness toward localized products. This outcome aligns with Fang (2025), who emphasizes that menu localization implemented through glocalization strategies facilitates emotional resonance between global brands and local consumers, thereby strengthening market positioning.

Moreover, technological advancements further enhance this relationship. Zhang et al. (2024) note that tools such as natural language processing can improve the accuracy and cultural relevance of menu translation, supporting smoother localization processes. Given that digital platforms are increasingly central to consumer–brand interactions, customer engagement serves as a critical mechanism linking technological innovation with effective menu adaptation. Supporting this view, Ragesh et al. (2025) illustrate how multinational fast-food brands, including McDonald's, successfully balance standardization and localization to improve market performance.

In the context of Marrybrown, adapting menu items to reflect local tastes and cultural preferences appears to strengthen engagement and foster greater acceptance of localized offerings. However, although customer engagement emerges as the most influential predictor, the model's explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.349$) suggests that engagement alone does not fully account for variations in menu localization acceptance. This implies that customer engagement must be reinforced by additional organizational capabilities, such as operational flexibility and continuous market responsiveness, to maximize localization effectiveness. This interpretation is consistent with prior research by Noris et al. (2025), which states that engagement-driven localization strategies are most effective when supported by broader strategic and operational frameworks.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that Marrybrown should intensify its digital engagement initiatives and interactive communication strategies. Highly engaged customers can also be strategically leveraged as early adopters to support the introduction of localized menu items in new international markets.

The Role of Brand Loyalty in Supporting Menu Localization (H2)

The analysis also confirms H2, showing that brand loyalty has a positive and statistically significant impact on menu localization acceptance. As reported in Table 3, brand loyalty exhibits a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.203$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating that customers with stronger loyalty toward Marrybrown are more willing to support and accept localized menu strategies.

Brand loyalty reflects consumers' emotional attachment, trust, and long-term commitment to a brand. Loyal customers are more likely to interpret localized menu offerings as a natural extension of the brand's identity rather than as a departure from familiar products. Consequently, they demonstrate greater openness to cultural adaptations and reduced resistance to menu innovation. This supports the view that loyalty serves as a stabilizing force that facilitates consumer acceptance of strategic changes (Nurhilalia & Saleh, 2024).

These findings are consistent with prior literature emphasizing the supportive role of loyal customers in localization efforts. Khan & Siddiqui (2025) and Majeed et al. (2025) argue that culturally adapted offerings can strengthen emotional bonds, as consumers perceive localization as an expression of cultural respect and brand sincerity. Within Marrybrown's international operations, strong brand loyalty helps mitigate uncertainty when introducing new menu items and encourages sustained acceptance across diverse cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, the relatively smaller coefficient for brand loyalty compared to customer engagement indicates that loyalty alone may not sufficiently explain differences in menu localization acceptance. This suggests that while loyalty provides an important foundation, it must be complemented by active engagement strategies, effective communication, and ongoing market research. This conclusion aligns with existing studies that emphasize the need for integrated approaches combining loyalty programs with dynamic engagement initiatives to enhance localization outcomes (Park, 2025).

From a practical standpoint, Marrybrown should continue to nurture long-term customer relationships while embedding loyalty programs within broader digital engagement strategies. Loyal customers can function as brand advocates and early adopters, thereby amplifying the impact of menu localization initiatives in international markets.

Overall Implications

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that customer engagement and brand loyalty play distinct yet interconnected roles in shaping acceptance of menu localization strategies. Customer engagement emerges as the primary driver of acceptance, while brand loyalty acts as a reinforcing mechanism that supports cultural adaptation efforts. These results highlight the importance of adopting an integrated strategic approach that combines engagement, loyalty, and cultural sensitivity to support Marrybrown's global expansion and long-term competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how customer engagement and brand loyalty influence consumer acceptance of menu localization in the context of international fast-food expansion. The findings provide clear empirical evidence that acceptance of localized menu offerings is shaped primarily by relational factors rather than by product adaptation alone. Specifically, customer engagement emerges as the strongest determinant of menu localization acceptance, while brand loyalty plays a supportive yet meaningful role in reinforcing positive consumer responses to culturally adapted menus. Together, these factors enable fast-food brands to balance local responsiveness with the preservation of a consistent brand identity across international markets.

The results indicate that consumers who actively interact with the brand through digital platforms, promotional activities, and experiential touchpoints are more receptive to menu adaptations that reflect local tastes and cultural norms. Such engagement enhances familiarity and emotional connection, leading customers to perceive localization efforts as relevant and considerate rather than arbitrary changes. In parallel, brand loyalty reduces uncertainty when new menu items are introduced, as loyal customers are more inclined to trust the brand's strategic direction and interpret localized offerings as aligned with its established positioning.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that Marrybrown should prioritize the development of digital engagement initiatives, including social media interaction, interactive campaigns, and responsive online communication channels that encourage two-way engagement with consumers. Emphasizing the brand's Halal positioning may further strengthen credibility and acceptance in culturally sensitive markets such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East. In addition, adopting a gradual localization approach, such as pilot testing region-specific menu items and implementing targeted promotions, can support informed decision-making before large-scale market rollout.

Overall, sustained growth in the international fast-food industry depends on a brand's ability to align menu strategies with evolving local preferences while maintaining strong and meaningful relationships with consumers. By integrating engagement-driven

practices with loyalty-based strategies, Marrybrown can enhance consumer acceptance of menu localization and reinforce its long-term competitiveness across diverse global markets.

LIMITATION

Although this study contributes valuable insights into menu localization strategies within the fast-food sector, several limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. First, the study relies on self-administered survey responses, which may be subject to perceptual bias. Respondents' evaluations could reflect personal impressions or socially acceptable answers rather than their actual consumption behavior, potentially affecting the precision of the measured relationships.

Second, the empirical sample is restricted to Malaysian consumers. While this focus is appropriate given the research context, it may constrain the general applicability of the findings to markets with different cultural, economic, or institutional environments. Consumer reactions to localized menus may vary substantially across regions, particularly in markets with distinct food cultures and competitive structures.

Third, the analytical scope of this study centers on customer engagement and brand loyalty as key explanatory variables. Other relevant factors, such as operational flexibility, regulatory requirements, supplier networks, and logistical considerations, were not included in the model. These elements may also influence the feasibility and effectiveness of menu localization initiatives, especially in international settings.

In addition, the cross-sectional research design captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to observe how attitudes and acceptance of localized menus develop as brands refine their strategies. Consumer responses may change as familiarity with localized offerings increases or as market conditions evolve.

Future studies may address these limitations by adopting longitudinal research designs to examine changes in consumer acceptance over time and by extending the investigation to multiple countries to enable cross-cultural comparisons. Including additional contextual variables, such as technological infrastructure, competitive intensity, and institutional frameworks, could further enrich the understanding of menu localization strategies within the global fast-food industry.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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