

Technology Connectivity and Coffee Enthusiasts

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Abstract: *The objective of this research is to explore the opinion of coffee enthusiasts towards coffee providers in the market. As such, the link between brand image and customer delight has been referred to. Customer delight is important and needs to be in focus as buying patterns change when new brands come into the market. An assessment of the interrelationships between the variables was conducted by using a mixed method research. The purposive face to face sampling technique was used with 300 respondents between the ages of twenty and forty were interviewed within the Klang Valley. The data was analysed by using thematic content analysis and simple coefficient analysis. The results evidenced a connection between brand image and customer delight. This indicated the only technology factor which is Wi-Fi facilities as the main predictors of customer delight. This finding concerned the coffee shops – their interiors and ambiance, coffee taste and high-quality ingredients, properly managed facilities, staff attitude & services, and active engagement with social media influencers. Last but not least, in order to generalize the results of this study, future research is needed.*

Keywords: customer delight, brand image, technology, coffee enthusiasts

1. Introduction

Coffee is a beverage that people have been drinking for more than 500 years. People the world over love to drink it, so the industry it is in is worth over US100 billion. With coffee being the mainstay of everyday routine of many individuals, it is unimaginable that the future of the coffee business does not prosper. Back in Malaysia, the coffee culture started in the 19th century. Noticed that this was the time when the Chinese migrated to Malaysia around 1898. Following their migration, coffee shops are launched in communities. Soon the locals frequent the shops as their meeting place too apart from their habits of consuming a coffee a day. During the British colony, the coffee shops were called Kopitiam, which means coffee shop in Hokkien. This was mentioned in an article titled, “Coffee drinking culture in Malaysia”, by Cynthia Ignatius, that was published on Business Today’s website dated September 9, 2022. Kopi, a Malay word for coffee, is brewed by pouring boiling water through a cloth filter and collected over the ground coffee. Following this type of brewing, Malaysia later claimed the ownership of Kopi. According to Statista Market Forecast, the revenue from the coffee segment (instant and roast) in Malaysia was US\$1,296.00M in 2022. The annual expected rate of return from the coffee segment is 7.28% (CAGR 2022-2025). The expansion of the coffee industry

in Malaysia is attributable to many factors. One example is hectic lifestyle.

2. Customer Delight

Customer delight is the positive feeling customer has about a company or a brand that company carries. The feeling is created by something that exceeds customers' expectations of the product or brand. Hence, there is joy and delight from the customers. The latter or delight is created when the product or brand provides a remarkable experience to the customers when the above expectation focuses on their needs, interests, and wishes. To understand clearer, we need to differentiate between customer satisfaction and customer delight. Customer satisfaction is about providing customers with the desired product or service that meets their expectations; hence they become joyful. On the other hand, customer delight is providing something beyond customer satisfaction that customers would not have thought of (Torres & Ronzonin, 2017).

Thus, customer delight has a WOW effect (Dubey et al., 2018). A satisfied customer's fulfillment lies between his or her expectations and the desired results. A delighted customer feels that the desired results have not only been met, but also exceeded. It is very important to have a clear understanding of the following three elements:

Satisfaction: You did enough to fulfill an expectation;

Delight: You went above and beyond a desire which is unexpected;

Loyalty: You satisfied them so much that they prefer you over any competitor.

When customers do not make any complaints or they continually purchase the company's product or service, these give sufficient reasoning that the customers are loyal. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes it may just be that they do this out of habit or pure convenience. However, when satisfied customers become delighted customers, this brings huge benefits for a brand. This means companies that managed to delight customers are the ones that have essentially and effectively established a sense of loyalty (Kim et al., 2013).

What is the difference between customer delight and customer satisfaction? These two concepts are not the same. However, being satisfied also means receiving a decent or an acceptable standard customer service. When customers make purchases, they expect to receive a decent customer service. Customer delight on the other hand, means receiving something that exceeds expectations and this extra makes a lasting impression. If customers are satisfied, they may still leave, but when they are delighted with the company's product or service, it is not easy to find a replacement and it will be costly too to find something similar and with extras. Thus, this makes companies realize that loyalty does not come from giving customers the status quo, but from offering something above and beyond that makes the customers surpass their expectations. In other words, the reality is that customers who feel good and feel that they are appreciated will return, invest more, and refer to other customers.

2.1 Why Does Customer Delight Matter?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the extras or add on brings customer delight. Now, it has become a necessity. For example, during the pandemic, small businesses have two choices. First is fundamentally changing the direction of a business or create a new business model. Second is to remain with the existing business model and hold on to the customers they currently have. Those who took the latter route had no choice, but to delight customers (Kim, & Park, 2019). It appears that customer delight is the way forward now as post COVID-19 has seen many businesses plummeted in sales revenue. The following are benefits of creating

customer delight for any business:

i. They know you care.

Customers tend to be loyal to businesses that appreciate them in good and bad times. These involve listening to them and responding to their complaints and desires. When customers gain attention as above, the respective company will be able to identify opportunities to delight them, and enhance relationship with them, i.e., the customers.

ii. They become free promoters.

Word-of-mouth marketing is the cheapest and arguably most effective way to promote a business and delight customers. As it is also natural in achieving, delighted customers tend to share their excitement with friends, family and others in their network. Some may share an update or post a tweet praising a brand, for example. That kind of referral is more powerful and effective than an advertising campaign.

iii. It increases customer spending.

Customers tend to spend more on companies that have made them happy. This means the more a company has delighted them, the more they are apt to spend on that company.

iv. It protects reputation.

Your business is only as good as its reputation. A bad review or several complaints on the social media can affect sales negatively. However, if a company delights their customers, this will cushion other strengths of the company from any bad reviews. Usually, a company has its own brand ambassadors who believe in the company and will likely defend the company against negative comments.

2.2 Who Is Responsible for Delighting Customers?

Delighting customer is the task of every customer-facing employee in a company. Larger businesses usually have a team for the task, compared to small businesses where the task needs to be carried out by practically everyone in the company. The idea is to create customer delight in every aspect of the business, from telephone calls to the social media. Everyone in the company should know that they need to surpass the expectations of customers regarding a product or service. Whether a customer interacts with a sales representative, engages with a brand on Instagram or calls customer service, they should be delighted from an experience that they have gained unexpectedly from their desired product or service.

3. Brand Image

Brand image is how customers think of a brand, that is, the perception of a brand in the minds of customers. This image develops over time based on their interactions and experiences with the brand. Moreover, these interactions take place in many forms so the experiences do not necessarily involve the purchase or use of products and services. Additionally, Kotler & Gertner (2002) explained that *brand image comprised a set of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person holds regarding an object*. This idea about brand image elaborates how a customer views and understands the identity, purpose and values of a brand that the brand wants to project. However, the way a customer interprets a brand will differ from another customer. The differentiation depends entirely on the customers' values, their beliefs and ideas, and how the brand resonates with those. That is, to what extent a brand image is similar to what the customer thinks or believes.

Over time, a company might be confused between brand image and brand identity. Brand

identity concerns how the brand wants their customers to perceive them. In other words, it is how a company should portray itself to their customers. On the other hand, brand image concerns how customers perceive the brand. Therefore, the brand can present its identity according to the way it wants. However, there is a possibility that customers may see the mirage of it. When this happens, the brand is seen as something that is completely different from that intended to be portrayed by the company.

Meanwhile, brand attributes are the brand's traits that resonate with consumers' personal characteristics and feelings. For example, there are many studies on brand attributes that represent brand image such as credibility, uniqueness, relevance, consistency, proper positioning and others (Dzyabura & Hauser, 2019). They help a brand stand out among competitors as those images relate to customers. Hence, customers recognize them easily. For this study, the attributes of brand image were determined by the consumer themselves. The rationale is that consumers' preferences keep changing. The changes are unpredictable. Consumers claim they have less time, but in actuality they are more conscientious. They shy away from stores and prefer experiences over products (Moore & Helstein, 2018). These situations are as though there has been a seismic or sudden shift in the consumers' mindset and choices. This shift has left the market asking *who is this brand-new consumer?*

There are even more clichés surrounding the millennial consumers. They are often branded or generalized as being narcissistic, idealistic, and socially conscious. Hence, they prefer more experience over products compared to any of their preceding generations (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). This concerns whether the consumer has fundamentally changed. In the affirmative, in what ways have they changed? Is the change seismic? When these happen, it is as though there is fundamental change in consumer behavior. Motivated by the above questions, this study was conducted to investigate whether this consumer group have been either missed or misunderstood previously.

4. How to Measure Customer Delight?

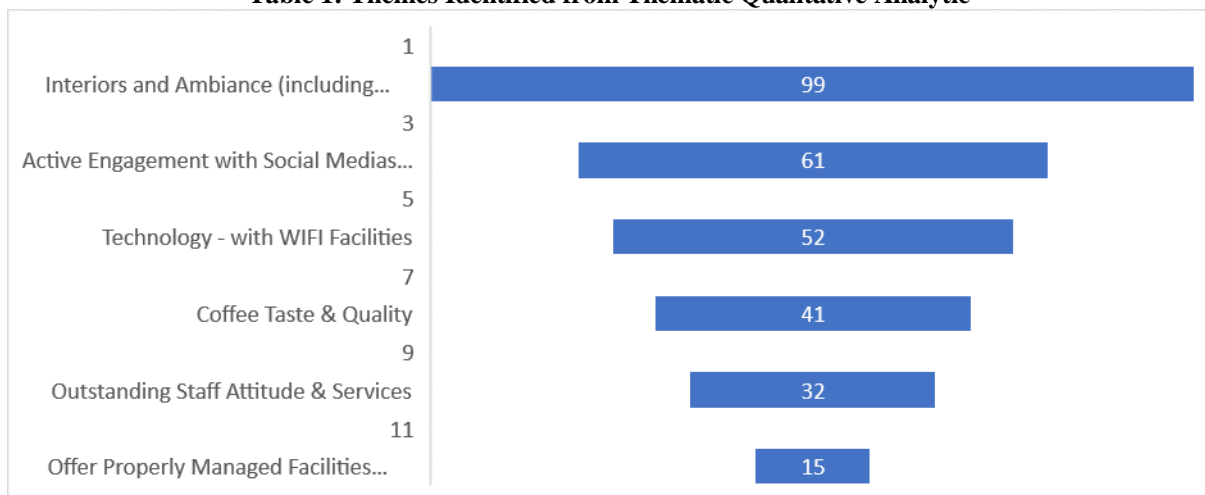
Based on the previous section, to create customer delight can be time consuming. We can describe it as a strategy of trial and error to get it right. This means companies cannot do it in a vacuum, but requires customer feedback. In other words, companies must determine the impact from their moves, to measure success. Previous studies have suggested that researchers need to start by creating a baseline of the current customer satisfaction (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). This means they need to conduct a quick survey of the customers to find out if the service is satisfactory, great, or needs improvement. Hence, there need to be open-ended questions about customer expectations or what they want to see improve. Once the company have this customer feedback, it become convenient to identify the areas that need to be improved.

This study utilized a mixed method technique. The focus was not on behavior, but on broad trends that impact behavior. This means the investigation needed to be in depth with regards to how respondents spend their money and time, where they go, and what is most important to them when they visited coffee shops. For these purposes, an interview was conducted with 30 loyal customers aged between twenty to forty to capture their views pertaining to the issues of the study. Having conducted this approach would help researchers in understanding what consumers want or why they come to selected coffee shops. Those are the most fundamental questions that needed to be comprehended initially for the age group categories. Next, in order to qualify customers as loyal, several areas needed to be thoroughly examined such as the

frequency of visits to the coffee shops in the last three months, how they spend their money, how they occupy their time, where they go, and what matters to them. As we needed to integrate high curiosity into our investigations, we are actually constructing a model of consumers who have either changed or have not changed at all.

This study utilized the thematic qualitative analytical technique to analyse the data (Hingley, 2005; Hingley et al., 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994a, 1994b). In practice, thematic analysis is characterized as having a predetermined framework comprising interrelationships of variables that would guide the researcher in search for patterns or themes (Anizah et al., 2022; 2023). In the context of this study, six themes were identified, namely *interiors and ambiance*; *social medias influencers*; *Wi-Fi facilities*; *coffee taste & quality*; *staff attitude & services*; and *properly managed facilities (which included parking, delivery, modes of payment, custom printed coffee cups/ sleeves/ packaging bags/napkins and etc.)*. Based on the themes identified, a structured questionnaire was prepared. The scale used was Likert scale from a value of 1 to 10 and the questionnaires were distributed to 300 coffee lovers aged between twenty and forty years old. The sample was extracted by using the purposive sampling technique and this was conducted at the coffee shops' premises located within the Klang Valley area, for both approaches. Table 1 and 2 display the findings of the topics discussed.

Table 1: Themes Identified from Thematic Qualitative Analytic



*No of times mentioned during the interview (N=300)

The results of Table 1 revealed that today's coffee lovers aged between twenty and forty prefer to patronize coffee shops that offer excellent café interiors and ambiance (including furniture, lighting, layout & design, smell & color), are involved in active engagement with social medias (including word of mouth), offer superb WIFI facilities, offer premium coffee taste & quality, hire outstanding staff with good attitude & services, offer properly managed facilities (which include parking, delivery, modes of payment, custom printed coffee cups/ sleeves/ packaging bags/napkins and etc.).

By using coefficient analysis, the results of Table 2 showed that respondents predicted customer delight to be equal to $0.612 + 0.528$ (*Technology-Wi-Fi facilities*) + 0.411 (*interiors and ambiance*) + 0.366 (coffee taste and high-quality ingredients) + 0.300 (*offer properly managed facilities*) + 0.092 (*outstanding staff attitude & services*) + 0.051 (*active engagement with social media influencers*). In addition, the results confirmed Wi-Fi facilities as the main predictors of customer delight in relation to coffee shops, followed by café interiors and ambiance, coffee taste and ingredients, properly managed facilities, staff attitude & services,

and last but not least the engagement with social media influencers.

Table 2: Coefficient Analysis

Model	β	Standard Error	t - Stat	p -value
(Constant):				
Customer delight	0.612	0.411	4.021	0.000
Excellent café interiors and ambiance	0.411	0.315	1.881	0.000
Active engagement with social medias influencers	0.051	0.038	0.006	0.000
Superb with Wi-Fi facilities	0.528	0.037	3.016	0.000
Premium coffee taste and high-quality ingredients	0.366	0.028	1.058	0.000
Outstanding staff attitude & services	0.092	0.055	0.532	0.000
Offer properly managed facilities	0.300	0.102	1.021	0.000

Wi-Fi facilities

The results or findings also determined that Wi-Fi installation (wireless internet access) is a necessity in a coffee shop setting. It is necessary that the Wi-Fi worked together with the interior design elements. The interior design elements later create the functional space. Specifically, the functional space acts as the entire base of the coffee shop. Therefore, it is important for the management of the coffee shop to be aware of the availability of space. This was because the findings identified Wi-Fi facilities provided by the management as creating customer delight. In other words, customers frequent a coffee shop to get some work done whereby the shop has reliable connection they may not have access to elsewhere. Customers that are trying to make the most of the free connection will happily buy dessert or an additional drink as they want to stay longer to finish their work. Therefore, customers will choose coffee shop establishments that care about their customers and most importantly customers feel comfortable to be in the shop. Customers who need the free Wi-Fi are likely to spend more time in the shops. This provides opportunity to the shops to upsell. In addition, the management of the coffee shop can use the Wi-Fi service to gather additional customer data. For example, the management can collect information about how often the customers visit, how much they use the Wi-Fi, and other needed information. Those are certainly valuable information that can be used to learn more about the customers and for increasing sales. The benefits of offering free Wi-Fi are as follows:

- i. Encourage customers to spend more
- ii. Target marketing more effectively
- iii. Increase customer loyalty

Interiors and Ambiance

Coffee lovers may be paying for the stimulation provided, but what they are really seeking is the relaxation part. As such, this presents the essential paradox that makes up the atmosphere of the coffee shops. The ambiance that the coffee shops create must ensure it is pleasant or stimulating to the senses and the atmosphere is a comforting one. This is the reason why many venues use large windows in their coffee shops to receive the natural light and hang mirrors on the interior walls to create the illusion of additional space. In addition, the music in rotation must be considered carefully, which means the music or song selected must match the

ambiance that the shop wants to create. Moreover, ambience is as important as great coffee as today's coffee shops also promote relaxation and lounging. Therefore, aesthetic elements must include ambient or general lighting, pleasing colors, artwork, durable furniture, and finishes.

Next, the aesthetic elements should complement the style of the interior as these would make the customers feel comfortable enough to occupy or move around the space. Preferably, stylish couches and comfortable chairs need to be in place for those that wish to enjoy their beverages while reading or working on their computers. Thus, the coffee shop's interior design plays an important role in creating customers' positive feelings while they enjoy the taste of their coffee. Obviously, for businesses this design can have strong impact on operations such as in attracting customers and achieving brand loyalty. The interior design needs to work hard on creating customer experience. Equally important to note for businesses is that as the day progresses, the mood of the coffee shop is adjusted accordingly to accommodate evening and night settings. This can be implemented by altering music choices, adjusting lighting, or adding tablecloths for stylish look, and etc. Therefore, it is crucial for a company to create an environment that runs efficiently and effectively, as well as that which can provide the highest quality experience for the customer. Specifically, the coffee shop management should work harder in planning the interior design and creating the mood for their coffee shop.

Coffee Taste and Ingredients

The taste of premium coffee that is sourced from high quality ingredients and consistency in the taste are the keys to success of coffee shops. When preparing the marketing strategy of the coffee shop, the management needs to pick a mix of solutions that best suit the needs of the target consumers. Having the most popular products on the market and offering a different experience can make a coffee shop unique from the perspective of the customers. Therefore, the coffee shop management needs to include those elements in their strategy for attracting customers and creating customer delight. Additionally, by offering quality taste from the ingredients of the coffee can make customers feel good and delighted.

Properly Managed Facilities

Managing a coffee shop might seem like an easy task, but the successful management of it depends on thoughtful planning and execution. As such, a well-managed coffee shop would enable the shop to function at its most efficient and effective levels as the real added value improvements are attached to the shop's core business. Strategically, the shop's facilities are being elevated to a significant level of importance in order for tasks and opportunities to contribute to the coffee shop's success. This is a competitive advantage that the coffee shop achieves from the above provisions. Additionally, the coffee maker should be durable enough to produce high quantity of coffee daily, quick enough to meet demand during busiest times of the day (usually mornings), and large enough to produce sizable batches of coffee. Apart from that, the other elements of the package, namely automatic drip coffee makers; a high-quality espresso machine; an industrial coffee grinder; POS system; website; industrial blenders; ovens and toasters; refrigerators and freezers; shelving; containers; pumps; furniture; and storage should be in good condition at all times.

Staff Attitude & Services

Training provision enables staffs to do their jobs to the best of their ability and this can create a positive work environment. It also encourages them to work long in the organization as they feel confident performing a task that they already received training in terms of the skills. As a matter of reinforcement of those tasks that have trained to encourage continuous productivity from the staff or workers, the management of the coffee shop needs to conduct regular check-

in meetings with the team members. This regular check-in meetings are important as they enable open discussions with the workers concerning how they can best do the job at hand. This method ensures staffs become committed after they have understood their roles. Besides that, the method also assists staffs to brush up on other job skills that can improve their attitude towards customers. At the end of the day, good relationship between management and staffs can help to improve internal staff communication. When there is improved communication, staffs get the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on certain matters and issues.

Additionally, the good communication platform enables the management to share updates, expectations, and other important information with the entire team. As such, the coffee shop management needs to invest in a comprehensive system or platform so that a comprehensive quality training can be achieved by the staffs. In other words, staffs will understand that they not only need to know how to make great coffee that have consistent taste, but also knowledgeable on how to keep a shop clean and matters related to achieving an efficient working environment and the provision of excellent customer service to customers. This is because customers deserve to be in a place that they can sit comfortably for an extended time. Especially after a long tiring day at work. While competitors are encouraging their customers to rotate quickly to free up room for more customers, your coffee shop can perform something unique and more welcoming that eventually attains customer loyalty for your shop.

Engagement with Social Medias Influencers

Undeniably, coffee shops across the world are discovering the power of the social media. As coffee shops need dine-in customers to increase revenue from sales, the management must take the initiative to develop a strong online presence to woo people and make them regular and eventually loyal customers. A good suggestion would be to engage your customers with the social media influencers or the management attend public events so that samplings can be obtained to gather data for useful databases.

Alternatively, coffee art competitions can be seen as connecting or an activity that can help to boost sales during slow sales periods. During the coffee art competition, the management of the coffee shop that organize the event can use the opportunity to educate customers about the coffee shop products and specialty products. The competition, the giveaways and quality time between the management, staff and attendees can provide positive experience for the attendees.

Next, the management needs to focus on advertising the specialty products namely coffee specials on social media channels so that customers know they can expect the best taste and service from the shop. Last but not least, the social media platform gives the opportunity to pique customers' interest before they enter the coffee shop. As such, developing social media strategies for coffee shops can be rewarding to the business in terms of popularity and growth.

5. Conclusion & Managerial Implications

Apparently, the findings have debunked many conventional wisdoms about the new-age consumer. What have been revealed was that the consumers have not fundamentally changed; yet they changed because of the evolving environment around them overstimulated by economic constraints and new competitive options. The new-age customers are changing in reaction to the abundance of competitive options made available to them by technology. Over the past twenty years, the percentage of the population with college degrees or higher have increased significantly. As a result of this, we are moving towards a more educated and knowledgeable consumer base with different spending patterns. These life milestones certainly

have influenced how consumers spend their money.

This study uncovered that it was not only pleasant surprises that encouraged customers to share their experiences. In a different context, but same condition, nowadays people are more likely to return to coffee shops that offer services that are generally basic. The following are a mixture of brand image and customer delight variables identified as predictive factors for people of ages between twenty and forty to visit coffee shops. They are coffee shops with great wi-fi facilities, excellent interior and atmosphere, premium coffee taste with appropriateness in quality, well managed facilities, excellent staff attitude, and engagement with social media influencers. So, what really are customers looking for in a coffee shop that can delight them? This is the question that keeps many coffee shop owner managers busy all day. Does it have to do with offering the lowest price? A famous coffee shop has denied this. In fact, the key to a successful coffee shop is something that is not discussed regularly. A bundle of resources that is the key solution is a coordinated one that is capable of creating a fun, memorable, comprehensive experience, and most importantly the innovation of habit formed that is a very important foundation which have built success into coffee shops today. In general, it is the simplicity concept that matters, that is, coffee shops that simply provides the basic needs of customers, leading to experience impacting customer delight, in a coffee shop.

It appears that it is not the end of the story yet as heavy work awaits the telco service providers from now on. Specifically, these parties need to offer attractive telco packages to the F&B providers. As this can attract customers to stay longer in their coffee shops, the telco providers also receive ‘double joy’ in return. The telco packages will also attract the coffee shop entrepreneurs to use the same service from the telecommunications company for their personal and family use. Nonetheless, the telecommunications company needs to be more sensitive towards the coffee shop providers. The company needs to change their mind set from the old mind set to the new and modern mind set. Hence, the telecommunications service providers must act accordingly.

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