

Chapter 9

Staff Behavior and Physical Environment Quality as Antecedents of Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Roles of Brand Passion and Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to examine how staff behavior and physical environment quality impact brand loyalty in the fast-food industry, including the roles of brand passion and satisfaction as mediators. Data from 434 customers of a major fast-food chain in the Philippines were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The study finds that staff behavior affects brand passion, satisfaction, and loyalty, while physical environment quality influences brand passion and satisfaction but not directly brand loyalty. Brand passion and satisfaction are key mediators in these relationships. The study highlights the importance of staff training and an appealing physical environment in building brand loyalty.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the fast-food sector in the Philippines has rapidly expanded, becoming a key part of the nation's economy and business landscape (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Alvarez, 2020). In 2021, the food-service industry led in revenue, reaching PHP 203 billion with 4,411 establishments (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018). This growth is driven by food's cultural significance and changes in income, lifestyles, and preferences (Gabriel, 2001; Mina & Campos, 2017; Rahkovsky et al., 2018). To foster customer loyalty and ensure profitability, fast-food restaurateurs must refine their marketing strategies, enhance product offerings, and improve customer experience (Mubarok et al., 2023). Understanding the factors behind customers' fast-food choices is crucial for achieving this goal (Shahzadi et al., 2018).

Brand loyalty has been extensively examined in marketing and consumer behavior research, being recognized as a critical asset for organizational success (Mills et al., 2022). Understanding the factors that drive customer loyalty is essential for marketers and entrepreneurs, as it significantly influences profitability, competitiveness, and long-term business success (Del Mar Garcia-De los Salmones et al., 2005; Ngobo, 2016; Kim et al., 2020). Brand loyalty not only fosters strong, long-term customer relationships but also reflects customers' repeated purchases and emotional attachment to a brand (Rather et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020; Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014).

Research has highlighted that staff behavior and physical environment quality are significant determinants of brand loyalty. Attributes such as friendly, attentive, and respectful staff positively impact customer loyalty and dining experience (Yurt & Sağır, 2023). Similarly, factors like store design and cleanliness are crucial for maintaining customer loyalty (Sun & Moon, 2023). Additionally, customer satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between physical environment quality and brand loyalty. Studies have shown that customer satisfaction significantly influences this relationship (Ali et al., 2021; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). These findings are further supported by a range of studies within the fast-food industry, which consistently highlight the importance of both staff behavior and physical environment quality in fostering brand loyalty (Achamadi et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Villanueva et al., 2023).

While staff behavior and physical environment quality are well-established as key drivers of brand loyalty, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediator, contemporary literature has not extensively explored the impact of brand passion—customers' emotional attachment to the brand. Despite extensive research on the direct effects of staff behavior on brand loyalty, the role of brand passion as a mediator remains underexamined. As noted by Hyken (2022), emotional connections with a brand can significantly enhance customer preference. Incorporating brand passion into existing research is important due to its unclear relationship with other brand loyalty constructs (Albert et al., 2013). This study aims to address this gap by introducing a model that examines brand passion and customer satisfaction as mediators in the relationship between staff behavior, physical environment quality, and brand loyalty. The findings will provide valuable insights for entrepreneurs and marketers, helping them focus on strategies that enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen brand loyalty, and improve performance in the competitive fast-food industry.

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