THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-BRAND CONNECTION ON LOYALTY: BRAND EXPERIENCE AS A MEDIATOR

Conny Tjandra Rahardja[1*]
STIE YKPN Yogyakarta

Karmilawati[2]
STIE YKPN Yogyakarta

Email: conny@stieykpn.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study involved 145 respondents from the second-wave pioneer coffee product, with an interest in seeking answers: does the second-wave coffee product still have loyalists, even though it has been overshadowed by the massive and widespread third and fourth-wave coffees in every area? The study employed two independent variables, namely Self Brand Connection (SC) and the mediating variable Brand Experience (BE). The researchers were interested in analyzing the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on consumer loyalty through a case study on the second-wave coffee pioneer company. In this study, the indirect effects were mediated by BE. Primary data were obtained by distributing questionnaires using the Likert scale. The research data were processed using SPSS22 to present descriptive statistical results, validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests, regression tests, and Sobel tests to test mediation. The results showed that SC has a positive direct and indirect effect on loyalty. In this study, the indirect effect is categorized as partial mediation.

Keywords: self-brand connection, brand experience, loyalty.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini melibatkan 145 responden produk kopi pionir gelombang kedua, dengan tujuan untuk mencari jawaban: apakah produk kopi gelombang kedua masih memiliki loyalis, meskipun telah dibayangi oleh kopi gelombang ketiga dan keempat yang masif dan tersebar luas di Indonesia. setiap daerah? Penelitian ini menggunakan dua variabel independen yaitu Self Brand Connection (SC) dan variabel mediasi Brand Experience (BE). Para peneliti tertarik untuk menganalisis pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung variabel independen terhadap loyalitas konsumen melalui studi kasus pada perusahaan pionir kopi gelombang kedua. Dalam penelitian ini, efek tidak langsung dimediasi oleh BE. Data primer diperoleh dengan menyebarkan kuesioner dengan menggunakan skala likert. Data penelitian diolah menggunakan SPSS22 untuk menyajikan hasil statistik deskriptif, uji validitas dan reliabilitas, uji asumsi klasik, uji regresi, dan uji Sobel untuk menguji mediasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SC mempunyai pengaruh positif langsung dan tidak langsung terhadap loyalitas. Dalam penelitian ini pengaruh tidak langsung dikategorikan sebagai mediasi parsial.

Kata kunci: koneksi merek sendiri, pengalaman merek, loyalitas.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the report from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, Indonesia is one of the largest coffee-producing countries in the world, with national coffee production reaching 794.8 thousand tons in 2022. This figure represents a 1.1% increase compared to the previous year (Indonesia.go.id, 2023). It is known that most of Indonesia's coffee production comes from provinces located on the island of Sumatra.

Table 1. Ranking of Largest Coffee-Producing Provinces in 2023

No	Region	Production (Thousand Tons)
1	Sumatera Selatan	198
2	Lampung	108,1
3	Sumatera Utara	87,9
4	Aceh	71,1
5	Bengkulu	55
6	Jawa Timur	48,1
7	Sulawesi Selatan	27,5
8	Jawa Tengah	26
9	Nusa Tenggara Timur	25,1
10	Sumatera Barat	23

Source:https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2024/03/01/10-provinsi-penghasil-kopi-terbesar- 2023-mayoritas-dari-sumatera

More than 50% of the total production above is exported, while the remainder is used for domestic consumption.

Table 2. Realization and Projection of Coffee Production, Export, Consumption

No.	Year	Production (Tons)	Net Export	Consumption	% Export	% Consumption
1	2022	793.193	413.538	379.655	0.521359	0.47864139
2	2023	789.609	417.009	372.6	0.528121	0.47187912
3	2024	789.233	420.481	368.752	0.532772	0.46722831
4	2025	789.22	423.952	365.268	0.537178	0.46282152
5	2026	789.26	427.423	361.837	0.541549	0.45845095

Source: https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2024/03/01/10-provinsi-penghasil-kopi-terbesar-2023-mayoritas-dari-sumatera

Indonesia's excellence as a coffee producer is inseparable from the habits and societal patterns of coffee consumption. Indonesian society exhibits a distinct developmental phase in coffee culture that is intricately linked with their consumption patterns. Indonesian society has a coffee development phase related to the pattern of coffee consumption. Referring to kopikita.id (2023), there are four phases of changes in how coffee is consumed. The first phase emphasizes consuming coffee easily and practically, leading to the emergence of various instant coffee brands. The innovation that occurred in this phase is the best, formal, and advanced vacuum packaging.

This phase is characterized by vacuum packaging. In the second phase, consumers begin to demand delicious and high-quality coffee flavors by exploring the origin regions of the coffee and the locations where they drink it. Coffee is not just a beverage; consumers are starting to demand the best experience when drinking coffee. Starbucks is a pioneering company that responds to this business opportunity. Starbucks also creates social value when enjoying coffee at Starbucks. In the third phase around the 2000s, consumers become pickier by exploring the coffee supply chain from upstream to downstream which is enjoyable and of high quality until the coffee reaches the consumer's table.

This phase gave rise to single-origin coffee. In the fourth phase, there is a pronounced emphasis on the convenience of coffee enjoyment at any time and place, on a large scale. This epoch witnesses a proliferation of coffee shops across various locales, bolstered by automated machinery designed to process high-quality, pure-origin coffee beans. Noteworthy participants in this phase include Kopi Kenangan and Tali Jiwa, whose presence underscores the burgeoning trend towards accessibility and quality in coffee consumption.

Not only as a leading coffee producer in the world, but Indonesia also dominates as the highest-grossing market for modern coffee in Southeast Asia as follows:

Table 3. Coffee Turnover in Asian Countries Country Turnover (US$ in millions)

Country	Revenue (in millions of US dollars)
Indonesia	947
Thailand	807
Vietnam	572
Filipina	445
Malaysia	364
Singapura	284

Source: https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2023/11/17/indonesia-merajai-pasar-kopi-modern-di-asia-tenggara-pada-2023

The increase in sales among coffee enthusiasts in Indonesia is largely attributed to the coffee loyalists. Previous research has indicated that customer loyalty can be influenced by several factors, such as self-brand connection and brand experience. Self-brand connection (SC) reflects the extent to which a brand has integrated into a customer's self-concept. A brand that has become intertwined with a customer's identity positively impacts loyalty (Westhuizen, 2018). Brand experience encompasses the feelings, sensations, cognitions, and behavioral responses that arise

from stimuli received during interactions with a brand, directly or indirectly affecting loyalty (Schmitt et al., 2015).

Utilizing different case studies, Ramadhan & Rusmaningsih (2022) investigated the variables of self-brand connection (SBC), brand experience, and brand loyalty in a specific luxury fashion brand category. The surge in sales of luxury brands is attributed to the alignment of consumers' self-concepts with a high-end lifestyle. The findings revealed that brand experience has a positive effect as a mediator between self-brand connection and brand loyalty. This study suggests that the value of shopping experiences can serve as a mechanism to validate customers' self-concept alignment with luxury brands, thereby fostering customer loyalty.

Uikey & Baber (2023) conducted a study on the impact of green brand trust and self-brand connection on green brand loyalty, with green perceived value and green transparency as antecedents, using electric vehicles as a case study. The study found that green brand trust had a significant positive impact on green brand loyalty, while the relationship between self-brand connection and green brand loyalty was significant but weak. Moreover, Kini et al. (2024) examined self-concept, customer engagement behavior (CEB), and self-brand connections (SBC) about loyalty, an area that has received limited attention. This research involved 380 respondents and focused on fintech application users. The primary finding indicated that self-conception does not influence loyalty. In the path analysis, SBC positively influenced loyalty and acted as a perfect mediator between CEB and loyalty.

Pu et al. (2023) conducted a study on how interactions with a brand, both online and in-store, affect customer satisfaction and loyalty, considering self-identification with the brand. Based on an online survey of 332 customers of new Chinese coffee brands, the study revealed that both online and in-store experiences equally impact satisfaction, influenced by self-brand-identification. Additionally, customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between online/in-store experiences and brand loyalty. Interestingly, younger participants showed a stronger inclination toward loyalty to emerging Chinese coffee brands.

Building upon the insights provided by the studies and considering the dearth of research on relevant variables in the context of coffee, researchers are keen to explore further whether the creation of self-brand connection (SBC) and brand experience (BE) can enhance customer loyalty in the case of specific coffee outlet in Yogyakarta. Furthermore, researchers aim to investigate whether SBC and BE are also crucial for brand loyalists of a specific coffee brand in the second phase, despite the widespread emergence of various modern cafes in the third and fourth phases.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT
2.1 Loyalty

Kotler & Keller (2018) define customer loyalty as a deep-seated commitment that drives individuals to purchase or support preferred products or services consistently and periodically over a long period (Ishak & Luthfi, 2011; Oliver, 2010). Factors influencing loyalty include several aspects summarized by Gaffar (2007) and other researchers:

1. Satisfaction: Meeting customer expectations regarding products or services offered by a company.
2. Self-brand connection (emotional bonding): Refers to a brand's attractiveness in influencing customer characteristics, ultimately enabling customers to identify themselves through a brand.
3. Trust: Customers' willingness to trust a brand or company to meet their expectations.
4. Convenience (choice reduction and habit): Ease of transaction that creates comfort for customers to continuously purchase products or services from a particular brand.
5. Customer experience: Capable of altering consumer behavior towards a brand or company when receiving quality service.

According to Rai & Srivastava (2012), there are three indicators to measure customer loyalty:

1. Behavioral loyalty: Customers' willingness to repeatedly purchase the same product or brand.
2. Attitudinal loyalty: Emotional attitudes closely associated with a product or brand, reflected in customers recommending the product or service to others as their top choice. These aspects lay the foundation for understanding and developing hypotheses regarding customer loyalty in the context of coffee consumption in Indonesia.
3. Cognitive loyalty refers to the belief of customers regarding a service provider being superior to others. Consumers typically make this service provider their primary choice, with little sensitivity to the services provided, and consider certain exclusive services.

Based on the three types of loyalty mentioned above, this research primarily focuses on behavioral loyalty indicators.

2.2 Brand Experience

Brand experience pertains to cognition, feelings, sensations, and responses resulting from stimuli received by customers when interacting with products or brands, whether directly or indirectly (Schmitt et al., 2015). Customer responses may stem from the identity, packaging, design, communication, or company environment. Customer responses to a brand or company are not solely positive but can also be negative. Brand experience can be defined as a company's commitment to consistently provide services to its customers (Brodie et al., 2009). The significant role of brand experience created by companies for their customers can foster loyalty towards the company (Beckman et al., 2013).

Brakus et al. (2009) explain that stimuli related to the brand are the primary source of brand experience. Stimuli include brand identity and design elements such as logos, names, store appearances, and co-branding from sponsorships and marketing. Additionally, stimuli are received through marketing communications conducted by the company, such as advertisements, websites, store atmospheres, brochures, customer service, sales personnel, call centers, and the environment where the brand's products or services are sold.

Alloza (2008) describes brand experience as the perception or evaluation of customers each time they consume or try a particular brand's products, reflected in the brand image, advertising, and product or service quality, including the store atmosphere. Brand experience occurs when

customers seek information, try, use, wear, or consume a specific brand's products, then talk to others about the brand, attend brand events, or participate in promotions offered by the brand (Şahin et al., 2011). Brand experience dimensions of brand experience can be divided into three types: sensory, intellectual, and behavioral (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt et al., 2015). Additionally, it further explains the dimensions of brand experience, which are responses from consumers' internals:

1. Sensory Consumer experiences obtained through the five senses: sight, hearing, smelling, touch, and taste.
2. Affective Experiences felt by consumers, influencing mood and emotions. This includes sensations or feelings such as pride, shame, or disappointment, creating experiences for consumers physically, behaviorally, and in lifestyle.
3. Behavioral Responses shown by customers based on experiences that shape behavior or habits.
4. Intellectual Customers' experiences with a product can prompt them to form thoughts about a brand's presence. Business owners can recognize and understand the role of brand experience, which can aid in implementing business strategies to develop the business they run.

2.3 Self Brand Connection (SC)

SC is defined as the degree to which a customer incorporates a brand into themselves (Escalas, 2004; Bettman & Escalas, 2005). It can also be understood as having personal significance and a relationship between the customer and a brand that is perceived to be linked to their personal concept (Moore & Homer, 2008). Additionally, SC indicates a strong relationship involving aspects such as identity, trust, loyalty, and commitment. Various types of consumer-brand relationships have been identified, including loyalty-based and brand intimacy-based relationships (Fournier, 1998), where consumer-brand relationships resemble interpersonal relationships between individuals. Consumers form strong relationships with specific brands, involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects.

An individual's SC indicates the extent to which they integrate a brand into themselves (Dwivedi, 2014). Customers who integrate a brand into their self-concept can form SC, ultimately shaping their self-concept. The strength of a customer's SC can lead them to maintain their preferred brand (Hammerl et al., 2016). Several instruments can be utilized to measure an individual's SC (Westhuizen, 2018). Firstly, a brand can reflect its customers' personalities. Secondly, a brand can leave a first impression when seen in use by customers. Thirdly, the relationship between customers and a brand. Fourthly, a brand can provide information regarding the personalities of customers who use it. Fifthly, customer responses to a brand.

2.4 Hypothesis Development

**2.4.1 Influence of Self Brand Connection (SC) on Loyalty**

SC represents a strong unity and meaningful relationship between a customer's identity and a brand. The presence of SC can evoke positive brand behaviors and loyalty to the related brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Research findings by Westhuizen (2018) explain that self-brand connection positively influences loyalty (Akhtar et al., 2022). Referring to the description above, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Self-brand connection positively influences consumer loyalty.

2.4.2 Influence of Self-Brand Connection (SC) on Consumer Loyalty with Brand Experience (BE) as a Mediator

Customer loyalty is a deep-seated commitment to purchasing or supporting preferred products or services (Kotler & Keller, 2018). Customer loyalty can be formed with the presence of SC, which is the connection or relationship between the customer and the brand. A brand can represent the self or identity of its user, leading customers to prefer purchasing and consuming products from brands that they perceive can also reflect their identity. Customers with SC and BE will interact intensively with the brand (Cheng, 2012). Indirectly, consumers will remember the brand and associate with it (Beckman et al., 2013; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017), which impacts loyalty (Akhtar et al., 2022). Customers who feel that a brand can reflect their identity tend to have more experiences consuming that brand's products. Furthermore, with a sense of identity towards a brand and better experiences, customers' commitment or support towards that brand will also increase, leading to loyalty (Westhuizen, 2018). The formulated hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Brand experience mediates the influence of self-brand connection on consumer loyalty.
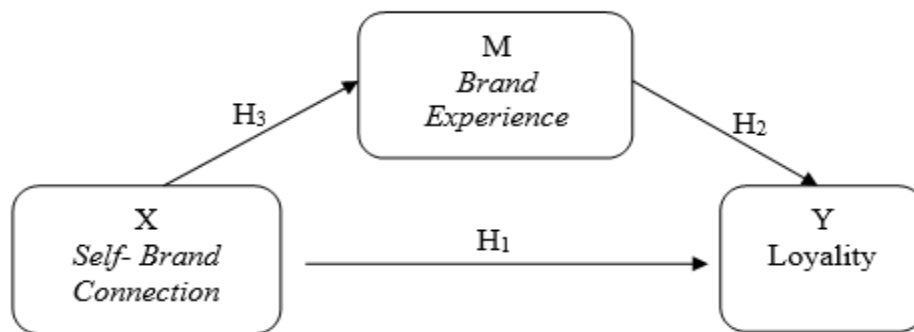
Picture 1. Research Model

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employs the purposive sampling technique, with the criteria being respondents who have a penchant for enjoying coffee at a specific café, with Starbucks in the Yogyakarta region as a case study. The total number of respondents utilized in this research is 145 individuals. The research data obtained was processed using SPSS2 4.

3.1 Respondent Demographics

This study utilizes primary data acquired by distributing questionnaires via Google Forms with a 5-point Likert scale (Roopa & Rani, 2012). The Google Forms were disseminated, yielding 145 respondents who met the criteria. The demographic details of these 145 respondents are listed in the table below:

Table 4. Respondents' Demographics

Demographics Respondents	Number	Percentage (%)

Gender	Male	55	37,93
	Female	90	62,07
Age (years)	< 20 tahun	21	14,48
	20 - 25	69	47,59
	26 - 30	40	27,59
	>30	15	10,34
Education	High school or its equivalent	47	32,41
	University level	98	67,59
Occupation	Student	53	36,55
	Entrepreneur	29	20
	Private/public employee	63	43,45
Income/Allowance	< Rp 2.000.000	36	24,83
	Rp2.000.000 - Rp5.000.000	80	55,17
	> Rp5.000.000-Rp8.000.000	17	11,72
	> Rp8.000.000	12	8,28

Source: Processed by the researcher

3.2 Research Variables and Operational Definitions

Following Sugiyono (2013), this research involves three types of variables. The variable acting as the influencing factor, known as the dependent variable, is the self-brand connection (SC). Meanwhile, the variable dependent on the influence of the dependent variable is consumer loyalty. Additionally, this research also considers mediating variables, which mediate the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In this case, the mediating variable is brand experience.

SC refers to the level at which customers incorporate a brand into their self-concept (Escalas, 2004). SC indicators are adapted from Westhuizen (2018) study, utilizing 5 questions. Brand experience is a series of cognitions, feelings, sensations, and behavioral responses that arise because of stimuli received after interacting with a specific brand, whether through direct or indirect interaction, due to company, communication, design, packaging, or corporate environment (Schmitt et al., 2015). Brand experience indicators are adapted from Westhuizen (2018) study, comprising 15 questions. Customer loyalty refers to the commitment customers have in purchasing or supporting preferred brand products or services (Kotler & Keller, 2018). Loyalty indicators in this study are adapted from Westhuizen (2018) study, with 7 statements. All data obtained were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 Descriptive Statistics Results

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Dev
Self Brand Connection	1,2	4,8	3,9	0,66

| Brand Experience | 2,2 | 4,8 | 4,2 | 0,44 |
| Loyality | 2,5 | 5,0 | 4,0 | 0,59 |

Source: SPSS data processing

The average score for the self-brand connection variable is 3.90, indicating that most respondents express having a self-identity connection with products from the specified brand. The average score for the brand experience variable is 4.22, suggesting that respondents feel they have experienced products from the mentioned brand. The average score for the loyalty variable is 4.01, indicating that respondents have loyalty or allegiance to products from the specified brand. This implies that respondents are willing to voluntarily purchase products from this brand as long as they can, and customers will also strive to continue consuming these products whenever possible.

4.2 Validity Test Results

Validity testing was conducted on 5 indicators of the self-brand connection (SC) variable, 15 indicators of brand experience (BE), and 7 indicators of loyalty. All indicators from each variable were deemed valid as shown in the table below.

Table 6. Results of Validity Test of Research Variable

Indicators Item	Pearson Correlation	Significance
SC1	0,862**	0,000
SC2	0,876**	0,000
SC3	0,893**	0,000
SC4	0,848**	0,000
SC5	0,941**	0,000
BE1	0,786**	0,000
BE2	0,768**	0,000
BE3	0,815**	0,000
BE4	0,686**	0,000
BE5	0,726**	0,000
BE6	0,607**	0,000
BE7	0,728**	0,000
BE8	0,616**	0,000
BE9	0,643**	0,000
BE10	0,488**	0,006
BE11	0,548**	0,002
BE12	0,600**	0,000
BE13	0,714**	0,000
BE14	0,648**	0,000
BE15	0,669**	0,000
LY1	0,822**	0,000
LY2	0,737**	0,000
LY3	0,903**	0,000
LY4	0,551**	0,002
LY5	0,818**	0,000

| LY6 | 0,625** | 0,000 |
| LY7 | 0,841** | 0,000 |

Source: SPSS data processing

4.3 Reliability Test Results

Reliability is considered adequate if Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 in confirmatory research and > 0.60 in exploratory research (Rahardja, 2020). This study is categorized as confirmatory research, with results showing that Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are > 0.70, confirming that the research instrument is reliable. The reliability test results are presented in the table below.

Table 7. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Criteria
Self Brand Connection	0,930	
Brand Experience	0,911	Reliable
Loyalitas	0,863	

Source: SPSS data processing

4.4 Classical Assumption Test Results

Multicollinearity testing resulted in tolerance values for self-brand connection and brand experience being the same, each at $0.793 > 0.100$, and the VIF values for both variables at $1.260 < 10$, indicating no multicollinearity in the regression model. Normality testing using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a value of 0.567, greater than 0.05, indicating that residual data in the regression model have a normal distribution. Heteroscedasticity testing with the Glejser test produced significance values for the self-brand connection variable at 0.075, and for the brand experience variable at 0.545. Both values are greater than 0.05, indicating no heteroscedasticity in the regression model.

4.5 Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination indicates the model's ability to explain the variation in the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination value is 0.415. This value indicates that self-brand connection can explain 41.5% of the variation in customer loyalty, while the remaining 58.5% is influenced by other factors or variables.

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination Results

Variable	Adjusted R^2
Self Brand Connection (SC)	0,415
Brand Experience (BE)	0,532

Note: Self-Brand Connection (X), Brand Experience (M),

Additionally, the influence exerted by self-brand connection and brand experience on customer loyalty can also be observed. The coefficient of determination obtained is 0.532. This value indicates that variations in loyalty can be explained by self-brand connection and brand experience by 53.2%, while the remaining 46.8% is influenced by variables outside the scope of this research regression model. The ability of the self-brand connection and brand experience variables to explain the variation in customer loyalty by 53.2% is categorized as moderate.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing Results

This research has two hypotheses tested using simple linear regression analysis. The results of the analysis for the first hypothesis, which examines the influence of self-brand connection on customer loyalty, are presented below.

Table 9. Influence of Self Brand Connection on Loyalty

	Beta	Significance	Hypothesis 1
Self brand connection (SC)	0,647	0,000	Supported

Note: dependent variable: loyality

The research results indicate that the regression coefficient value for self-brand connection is 0.647, which is positive. This suggests that the influence of self-brand connection on customer loyalty is positively significant with a significance value of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05. This analysis result indicates that the first hypothesis of this research, that self-brand connection positively influences customer loyalty, is accepted. SC represents the level at which customers integrate a particular brand into their persona (Escalas, 2004; Dwivedi, 2014). Individuals who have a strong connection or relationship with a brand tend to prefer products from that brand over others. This is because they believe that the brand reflects their true selves to others around them (Bettman & Escalas, 2005). High levels of attachment to a brand lead individual to have high loyalty to that brand and provide support to the products they like (Brakus et al., 2009). Loyalty indicates how much someone likes a brand, leading them to prefer buying products from that brand over others. Once someone likes a brand, they are likely to try every product or service offered, whether they need it or just want to try the latest offerings. This discovery corroborates the investigations conducted by Westhuizen (2018), and Akhtar et al. (2022).

4.7 Sobel Test

The second hypothesis in this research examines the role of brand experience in mediating the influence of self-brand connection on loyalty. The testing is done using the Sobel test, preceded by multiple linear regression analysis to obtain regression coefficients along with standard errors used in the Sobel test calculation. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 10. Multiple Regression Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	,060	,344		,862
SC (X)	,422	,057	,471	,000
BE (M)	,546	,090	,388	,000

Note: Dependent Var (Y) - Loyality

To compute the Sobel test, we first need to identify the regression coefficients and standard errors for each independent (X), mediator (M), and dependent (Y) variable. From the provided table, we have:

- Regression coefficient between X (Self Brand Connection) and Y (Loyalty): b=0.422 (from the B column)

- Standard error for the regression coefficient between X (Self Brand Connection) and Y (Loyalty): Sa=0.057 (from the Std. Error column)
- Regression coefficient between M (Brand Experience) and Y (Loyalty): b=0.546 (from the B column)
- Standard error for the regression coefficient between M (Brand Experience) and Y (Loyalty): Sb=0.090 (from the Std. Error column)

After obtaining these data, the Sobel test calculation can be performed. The calculation is conducted using the following formula as follows:

Table 11. Sobel Test Calculation

a = 0.422	$Sab = \sqrt{b^2Sa^2 + a^2Sb^2 + Sa^2Sb^2}$
b = 0.546	$Sab = \sqrt{(0.546^2 \times 0.057^2) + (0.422^2\,0.090^2) + (0.057^2\,0.090^2)}$
Sa = 0.057	$Sab = \sqrt{0.000979 + 0.001444 + 0.000027}$
SC = 0.090	$Sab = 0.049496414$

Based on the acquired Sab value, the subsequent step entails computing the t-value from the Sobel test result. This can be accomplished utilizing the following formula:

$$t = \frac{ab}{Sab}$$

$$t = \frac{0.422 \times 0.546}{0.049496414}$$

$$t = 4.653$$

Based on this calculation, the obtained t-value is 4.653. This value is greater than the t-table value for a sample size of 145 with a 5% error level, which is 1.977. The analysis result indicates that brand experience significantly mediates the influence of self-brand connection on loyalty. Based on the testing results in the table above, the self-brand connection variable also directly and indirectly influences loyalty. The indirect influence is mediated by brand experience in this context, referred to as partial mediation. These analysis results indicate that the third hypothesis of this research, that brand experience mediates the influence of self-brand connection on customer loyalty, is accepted. This finding supports the research conducted by Westhuizen (2018), and Akhtar et al. (2022). When the attachment to a brand has become part of someone's identity, it will evoke stronger loyalty compared to brand experience, as shown in Table 8 where the beta value of SC 0.471 is higher than BE 0.388.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive findings and illuminating discussions presented in this study, several pivotal conclusions can be gleaned. Firstly, it is evident that the connection individuals establish with a brand, referred to as self-brand connection, wields a substantial and positive influence on consumer loyalty within the context of the second-generation coffee industry. This

influence manifests both directly and indirectly, highlighting the intricate interplay between consumer identity and brand allegiance.

Furthermore, our investigation underscores the nuanced role of brand experience as a partial mediator in the relationship between self-brand connection and consumer loyalty. While brand experience contributes significantly to shaping consumer perceptions and preferences, it is the depth of self-brand connection that emerges as the primary driver of sustained loyalty among customers.

In delving into the specific case of the second-generation coffee pioneer, compelling insights emerge regarding the paramount importance of fostering a profound self-brand connection with consumers. By effectively aligning the brand identity with the values and aspirations of its target audience, akin to establishing a symbiotic "brand soulmate" relationship, the company fortifies its offerings against competitive pressures and disruptive innovations within the industry.

Moreover, our analysis highlights the company's unwavering commitment to innovation and continual enhancement of the customer experience. This commitment is exemplified by initiatives such as the refinement of interior designs to optimize comfort and ambiance, thus engendering a more memorable and immersive brand encounter for patrons.

Additionally, the proactive solicitation of customer feedback to discern evolving preferences and desires emerges as a cornerstone of the company's strategic approach. By leveraging this invaluable insight, the company can tailor its product offerings and service delivery to align seamlessly with customer expectations, thereby fostering deeper engagement and loyalty.

Moving forward, future research endeavors in this domain could explore the dynamic interplay between self-brand connection, brand experience, and consumer loyalty across diverse cultural and demographic contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer invaluable insights into the evolution of consumer perceptions and brand relationships over time, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving loyalty within the coffee industry.

In terms of marketing strategies derived from the findings of this research, it is imperative for coffee industry stakeholders to prioritize initiatives aimed at cultivating authentic and resonant brand connections with consumers. This entails fostering brand narratives and experiences that resonate deeply with the values, aspirations, and lifestyles of target audiences, thereby fostering enduring loyalty and advocacy.

Moreover, embracing a culture of relentless innovation and continuous improvement in both product offerings and service delivery is paramount. By staying attuned to shifting consumer preferences and market dynamics, companies can position themselves at the forefront of industry trends and capitalize on emerging opportunities for growth and differentiation.

In conclusion, the insights garnered from this study underscore the critical importance of self-brand connection and brand experience in driving consumer loyalty within the second-generation coffee industry. By embracing these insights and implementing strategic initiatives informed by our findings, industry players can cultivate enduring brand relationships and forge a path toward sustained success and competitive advantage.

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