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Impact of brand image and product quality on consumer purchase decisions in Malaysia's social media landscape

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Abstract

This study examines at how Malaysian consumers' decisions to buy on social media platforms are influenced by brand perception and product quality. Understanding the factors influencing consumer purchasing decision is essential for businesses to stay competitive given Malaysia's tremendous growth in social media and e-commerce. This study uses a quantitative methodology, gathering data using an online survey that is structured. Malaysian customers who were 18 years of age or older and had made purchases from retail coffee businesses in the previous six months provided a total of 257 valid responses. To investigate the suggested hypotheses, data analysis was carried out using SPSS and SmartPLS software, utilising descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Two main hypotheses were investigated in this study. The findings demonstrated that Malaysian consumers' purchasing decisions are not statistically impacted by brand image. This challenges conventional views that highlight brand image as a primary factor in consumer behaviour. On the other hand, the findings showed a strong positive relationship between product quality and purchase decision. Malaysian consumers place emphasis on product performance, dependability, and durability. This indicate that businesses need to put a high priority on product quality to attract and retain customers.

Keywords: Brand Image, Product Quality, Purchase Decisions, Social Media Platforms, Malaysian Consumers.

INTRODUCTION

The intensifying competition across industries in today's globalized business environment is a well-documented phenomenon. This trend is particularly evident in Malaysia, a developing nation that is experiencing rapid industrial growth, including in the coffee sector. Malaysia's coffee industry has seen a proliferation of coffee shops, both local and international, vying for consumer attention. This intensifying competition underscores the importance of distinguishing factors like product quality and brand image, which have become central to business strategies aimed at attracting and retaining customers (Tan & Singh, 2022). These dynamics are especially pronounced on social media platforms, where brands actively engage with consumers to build their reputation and convey the quality of their products.

Product quality has emerged as a critical determinant of consumer choice. According to Kotler et al. (2013), product quality refers to a product's ability to perform its intended functions, encompassing characteristics like durability, reliability, usability, and reparability. These attributes significantly influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Mao et al., 2020). Recent studies (Tan & Wong, 2022) have reinforced the critical role of product quality in influencing purchasing decisions, particularly in the context of social media. Malaysian consumers, exposed to a wide array of products and brands through these platforms, often rely on indicators of quality—such as product reviews and endorsements—to guide their purchasing decisions. Hence, the interplay between product quality and brand image becomes a significant area of study.

Brand image, defined as the perception of a brand as shaped by its attributes, advertising, packaging, and market reputation, is another pivotal factor in influencing consumer behaviour (Har, 2021). In Malaysia, a country where consumers exhibit high brand consciousness, brand image plays a decisive role in shaping purchasing decisions. Strong brand images are associated with trustworthiness, reliability, and perceived superiority. For example, international brands like Starbucks and Nestlé have successfully leveraged their brand image to maintain market leadership in Malaysia's coffee industry. Even during challenging periods, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these brands continued to thrive due to their strong consumer trust and loyalty. Conversely, local brands often struggle with perceptions of inferior quality. However, brands like Old Town White Coffee and ZUS Coffee have made strides in overcoming this bias through quality enhancement and strategic marketing, further emphasizing the critical link between product quality and brand perception. Despite the apparent synergy between brand image and product quality, exceptions exist where brand image does not significantly influence purchase decisions. For instance, consumers driven by price sensitivity or functionality may prioritize these attributes over brand reputation. Such scenarios highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of consumer behaviour, suggesting that brand image alone may not always dictate purchasing decisions. The increasing reliance on social media platforms has added another layer of complexity to these dynamics. Social media has not only democratized access to information but also intensified competition by exposing consumers to a broader range of options. Consumers in Malaysia frequently consult social media for product reviews, peer recommendations, and influencer endorsements before making purchase decisions. Consequently, businesses face the dual challenge of maintaining a positive brand image and ensuring high product quality to remain competitive. For instance, companies like Nestlé have capitalized on this trend by emphasizing their commitment to quality in their branding and communication strategies. By doing so, they have cultivated a reputation as a trusted brand, reinforcing consumer perceptions of quality and reliability.

The Malaysian coffee market, valued at USD 1.468 billion in 2023 with an expected annual growth rate of 4.40% (Statista, 2023), provides a fertile ground for exploring the interplay between brand image, product quality, and consumer purchasing behaviour. The sector's growth is driven by increasing consumer affluence and a preference for high-quality products, further underscoring the importance of these factors in shaping purchasing decisions. In addition to brand image and product quality, cultural values and other factors like price and convenience also play significant roles in influencing consumer behaviour. For example, in Malaysia, the concept of "face-saving" often influences purchasing decisions, with consumers gravitating towards products that reflect their social status. Luxury brands frequently benefit from this cultural nuance due to their association with exclusivity and prestige. However, the rise of e-commerce and social media has somewhat disrupted these traditional patterns by enabling consumers to compare products, read reviews, and make informed decisions more conveniently. This shift underscores the need for businesses to adapt their strategies to remain relevant in an increasingly digital and competitive marketplace.

The relationship between brand image, product quality, and purchasing decisions has been the subject of extensive research across different contexts. For example, Dhisasmito and Kumar (2020) demonstrated a strong correlation between brand image and customer loyalty in Indonesia, while Ali et al. (2017) found that brand image significantly influenced consumers' willingness to pay a premium in Pakistan. These findings align with the Malaysian context, where brand image and product quality are also crucial determinants of consumer behaviour. However, existing studies have largely focused on specific aspects of these factors, leaving gaps in understanding their interplay within the broader Malaysian market. Ariffin et al. (2016) identified product quality, service quality, and store environment as key influencers of brand image in Malaysian businesses. However, their study did not delve into the broader implications of these factors on consumer purchasing behaviour. Similarly, Song et al. (2019) highlighted the role of tangible proof, service quality, and price in shaping brand image in the Indonesian market but did not examine these dynamics within the Malaysian context.

This research aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of brand image and product quality on Malaysian consumers' purchasing decisions, particularly within the context of social media. Understanding these factors is critical for businesses seeking to develop effective marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience. By bridging the gap in existing literature, this study seeks to offer actionable insights for Malaysian companies striving to build strong brand identities and deliver high-quality products in a competitive market landscape. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to the academic discourse on consumer behaviour and offer practical guidance for businesses operating in Malaysia's coffee sector and beyond.

The research questions guiding this study are formulated based on the background context and the identified research problem:

Research Questions

1. How does a company's brand image influence a consumer's decision to purchase a product?
2. To what extent does product quality impact consumer purchase decisions in Malaysia?

Research Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives, aligned with the research questions:

1. To analyse the impact of a company's brand image on consumer purchasing decisions in Malaysia.
2. To evaluate the extent to which product quality affects consumer purchasing decisions in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In recent years, Malaysia has solidified its position as a significant player in the global economy, particularly in the industrial sector. With its rising prominence, businesses in Malaysia face intensifying competition as they vie for consumer attention in a dynamic and fast-evolving marketplace. To succeed amidst this heightened competition, it is imperative for businesses to understand the key factors that shape consumer purchasing decisions. Among these factors, the relationship between consumer preferences, product quality, and brand image stands out as critical. A deep understanding of how these elements interact can provide invaluable insights for businesses aiming to gain a competitive edge in the Malaysian market. This literature review delves into these components, exploring their significance and applicability within the Malaysian context. The concept of brand image has been widely studied, with various definitions and interpretations emerging over time. For instance, Rahman et al. (2021) define brand image as the cognitive and emotional impressions that distinguish a company from its competitors. This definition underscores the dual influence of brand image on consumer decisions, encompassing both rational evaluations and emotional connections. Such an understanding highlights the integral role brand image plays in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in a competitive market like Malaysia's.

Brand Image

When entering the Malaysian market, companies must prioritize their brand image, as it significantly influences consumer behaviour, particularly purchasing decisions. Brand image reflects how consumers perceive a company, encompassing rational evaluations and emotional connections. Research shows that a strong brand image enhances loyalty, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, sales (Pratiwi et al., 2022; Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). For instance, Rachmad et al. (2023) found that brand trust affects purchasing decisions through perceived product quality, though it may not always directly drive purchases. Similarly, Uripto and Lestari (2023) highlighted that consumer trust in Bata shoes is shaped by brand image, promotion, and product quality.

A robust brand image embodies consumer sentiments, perceptions, and associations, capturing a brand's distinctiveness and overall impression (Shi & Jiang, 2022). This concept is often analyzed through attributes such as personality, association, and perception. Ab Hamid et al. (2022) suggest that overall corporate image is a unidimensional construct shaped by functional attributes.

In competitive markets like Malaysia's premium coffee sector, brand image is a critical determinant of consumer choices. It serves as a differentiator, adding value to premium offerings and fostering emotional connections with customers seeking exceptional coffee experiences (Keller, 1993). The sector's growth is fuelled by global coffee culture, evolving consumer preferences, and the rise of specialty coffee brands. Companies like Starbucks and Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf have successfully built strong brand identities through consistent product quality, modern café environments, and globally recognized branding (Ali et al., 2021). These strategies, emphasizing quality assurance and experiential value, strongly influence purchase decisions. Similarly, Malaysian artisanal coffee roasters focus on authenticity and craftsmanship, leveraging local traditions to attract niche coffee enthusiasts (Ghazali et al., 2018). However, a strong brand image does not always guarantee consumer preference or loyalty. Factors such as price sensitivity and product quality can override brand perceptions (Rahman et al., 2019). For example, Malaysian consumers who prioritize taste, freshness, and ethical sourcing may disregard a brand's prestige if the product fails to meet these expectations. In the premium coffee market, discerning customers are often willing to explore lesser-known brands that deliver superior sensory quality. These dynamic highlights the nuanced role of brand image in influencing purchase decisions, particularly in contexts

where product attributes and ethical considerations are paramount. Thus, the consequent hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis (H1): *The purchasing decisions of consumers in Malaysia are significantly influenced by the brand's Image.*

Product Quality

Product quality is a critical factor for businesses entering the Malaysian market, as it significantly influences consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions. Defined as a product's degree of excellence or superiority, quality shapes consumer perceptions and willingness to pay premium prices (Khoo et al., 2020). It also serves as a key driver of competitive advantage, although its composition encompassing attributes like durability, functionality, performance, reliability, and serviceability varies across industries (Das Guru & Paulssen, 2020). Research highlights that product quality is both an objective and subjective assessment, where consumers evaluate a product's attributes and compare them with competing offerings. High-quality products often result in increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and an enhanced brand image (Nawi et al., 2019). For example, Islamic physical attributes and beliefs in product quality contribute significantly to customer happiness and brand trust in certain markets. Furthermore, in high-end sectors like premium coffee or mobile phones, product quality integrates marketing, engineering, and production efforts to meet consumer needs (Nicca & Herman, 2020).

Communicating a product's quality is equally vital. Signalling theory suggests that consumers rely on complementary information such as reviews and endorsements from sellers and other customers to assess quality (Yabin & Li, 2020). This underscores the importance of transparent and consistent messaging about a product's attributes.

In Malaysia's competitive manufacturing and consumer goods sectors, quality is a primary determinant of customer satisfaction and willingness to pay (Chua & Banerjee, 2016). Consumers prioritize attributes such as durability, reliability, and ease of use, expecting high-quality products to deliver long-term value. As such, companies must emphasize the use of superior raw materials and robust production processes to ensure quality, which in turn reinforces consumer trust and loyalty (Suhud et al., 2022). The Malaysian coffee market is marked by intense competition between international coffee chains and local artisanal brands. Global players like Starbucks dominate by offering standardized premium experiences, while local roasters and cafes target niche markets by emphasizing craftsmanship, locally inspired flavours, and unique consumer experiences (Ali et al., 2021). These local brands also educate consumers about coffee quality, focusing on bean origin, roasting methods, and brewing techniques, which has elevated consumer awareness and increased demand for premium offerings. The sector is further shaped by evolving consumer lifestyles and a preference for experiential consumption. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, are willing to pay a premium for high-quality coffee that delivers a holistic experience, including aesthetic presentation, ambience, and compelling brand narratives (Ali et al., 2021). This has expanded the definition of product quality to include not just physical attributes but also the overall customer experience.

Product quality remains a critical driver of success in Malaysia's premium coffee sector, influenced by sensory excellence, consistency, ethical sourcing, and immersive consumer experiences. As Malaysian consumers grow more discerning, coffee brands must prioritize superior quality and align with trends emphasizing sustainability, transparency, and craftsmanship to stand out in an increasingly competitive market. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed.

Hypothesis (H2): *The purchasing decisions of consumers in Malaysia are significantly influenced by the product quality.*

Purchase Decision

Purchase choices refer to the method by which customers choose whether or not to buy a good or service. Numerous elements, including company reputation and product caliber, as well as elements like cost, practicality, and personal values, have an impact on purchasing decisions. In Malaysia, a wide range of factors affect purchasing choices. According to Yan and Hee's (2022) research, variables like store ambiance, service excellence, and product variety had an impact on consumers' retail purchase decisions. The study also discovered that company reputation and product calibre played significant roles in influencing consumer choice. Perceived usability, price, dependence, perceived usefulness, and brand image, according to Yan and Hee's study from 2022, all had a significant influence on consumers' buying decisions. However, it was discovered that social influence was unrelated to smartphone purchase choices. According to Lim et al. (2020), attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were found to positively influence non-Muslim customers' decisions to purchase Halal food products in Malaysia (2020). In addition, the acculturation effect moderates the association between attitude and purchase intention.

While consumers with low cognitive reflectiveness will not pay attention to the material presented, those with strong cognitive reflectiveness will evaluate it in greater detail. When making decisions to buy products online, consumers' cognitive and emotional attitudes can be impacted by the hedonic and functional features of online shopping sites, such as product details, cost savings, convenience, and perceived ease of use (Sari, 2021). However, participants are permitted to exhibit risk aversion, psychological effort cost, and choice error, their behaviour is consistent with optimum search in the traditional decision-making process. As a result, it seems that decision makers can maximise stochastic risk averse utility through resource-rational search. Show how threshold models can be used to represent both computational and algorithmic aspects of search behaviour and shed light on the psychological components that influence sequential decision making (Bhatia et al., 2021). However, pricing deception reduces consumer purchase intention and has a detrimental effect on decision-making regarding purchases and its possible neurological underpinnings (Fu et al., 2019).

Consumer Purchase Decision and Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become essential tools for shaping consumer purchasing decisions in Malaysia. These platforms provide instant access to brand interactions, user reviews, and product details, fostering brand awareness and community engagement (Chua et al., 2022). Through visual content, influencer endorsements, and customer reviews, social media significantly influences consumer perceptions of product quality and brand image (Rahim & Abdullah, 2023). Malaysian consumers, especially younger demographics, actively use social media to research products before purchasing (Lim et al., 2022). Features like commenting, questioning, and engaging in brand discussions allow users to form or alter opinions on a company's reputation and product quality. Positive customer experiences shared online amplify a product's perceived quality, while complaints or negative reviews can quickly damage a brand's reputation, highlighting the need for consistent quality and prompt issue resolution (Tan & Wong, 2022). Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful driver of consumer decisions. Influencers, seen as trusted sources, can significantly shape brand perceptions and product evaluations, encouraging purchases of quality products they endorse (Chong & Lee, 2023). Moreover, the rise of social commerce, with features like "Buy Now" buttons and live-streaming sales, simplifies the purchasing process, emphasizing the strategic role of social media in modern consumer behaviour (Ali et al., 2022). To succeed, brands must leverage social media to highlight product quality, build trust, and streamline transactions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focused on Malaysian consumers aged 18 and above who had made a purchase from a retail or manufacturing business in the past six months. Data was collected through an online survey distributed via email and social media platforms, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. The final sample size of 257 respondents was collected to ensure validity and reliability. Participants were specifically selected from those who had purchased coffee products from cafes, reflecting the significant role of coffee consumption in Malaysia's retail industry. The survey, designed with closed-ended questions, focused on brand image, product quality, and purchase decisions. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS 4.1, with descriptive and inferential statistics applied to explore relationships between the key variables. The results were presented through visualizations to enhance clarity and understanding.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Below are the results of profiling two hundred and fifty-seven respondents who completed questionnaire using.

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the study, shown in Table 1, shows that of the survey involved 257 respondents, with a slightly higher proportion of females (51.8%) compared to males (48.2%). Respondents were categorized into four age groups, with the majority aged 26–35 years (32.7%), followed by 36–45 years (28.4%), 18–25 years (27.6%), and the smallest group being 45 years or older (11.3%). Regarding education, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (32.3%), followed by diploma holders (26.5%), and those with senior high school certificates or postgraduate degrees (20.2% each).

Table 1
Participants Profile

No.	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	124	48.2
Female	133	51.8
Age		
18 - 25	71	27.6
26 - 35	84	32.7
36 - 45	73	28.4
45 or older	29	11.3
Marital Status		
Married	137	53.3
Single	120	46.7
Education Level		
Junior high school or lower	2	.8
Senior high school	52	20.2
Diploma	68	26.5
Bachelor	83	32.3
Postgraduate	52	20.2
Profession		
Student	66	25.7
Government worker	49	19.1
Private worker	82	31.9
Business owner	56	21.8
Others	4	1.6
Social Media Profile		
Yes	254	98.8
No	3	1.2
Social Media Hours		
2 hours or less	3	1.2

4 hours	97	37.7
6 hours	125	48.6
More than 6 hours	32	12.5
Purchase Reasons		
Brand image	112	43.6
Product quality	64	24.9
Brand image and product quality	77	30.0
others	4	1.6
Monthly Income		
1800 RM or less	31	12.1
1900 - 5000	40	15.6
6000 - 9000	82	31.9
10000 or more	104	40.5
Residential Region		
Peninsula Malaysia (Semenanjung Malaysia)	178	69.3
Borneo (East Malaysia: Sabah, Sarawak, Labuan)	79	30.7

Only a small percentage (0.8%) had junior high school education or lower. In terms of marital status, 53.3% of respondents were married, while 46.7% were single. Professionally, 31.9% worked in the private sector, 25.7% were students, 21.8% owned businesses, and 19.1% were government employees, with only 1.6% falling into other occupations. Notably, 98.8% of respondents had a social media profile, with the majority (48.6%) using social media for six hours daily, 37.7% for four hours, and smaller proportions for two hours or less (1.2%) or more than six hours (12.5%). When asked about purchasing decisions, 43.6% cited brand image as their primary reason, 24.9% prioritized product quality, and 30% considered both factors equally. Monthly income distribution revealed that 40.5% earned above 10,000 MYR, 31.9% between 6,000 and 9,000 MYR, 15.6% between 1,900 and 5,000 MYR, and 12.1% less than 1,800 MYR. Most respondents (69.3%) resided in Peninsular Malaysia, while 30.7% were from East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak, and Labuan).

Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model, also referred to as the outer model in SmartPLS, was validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Following the hypotheses developed, the model was assessed with PLS-SEM implementation in SmartPLS 4.1. Indicators with loadings greater than 0.70 were prioritized, as this threshold is acceptable for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2019). Indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were retained only if their removal did not improve overall reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) beyond the recommended level (Hair et al., 2019). The primary model structure is depicted in Figure 1.

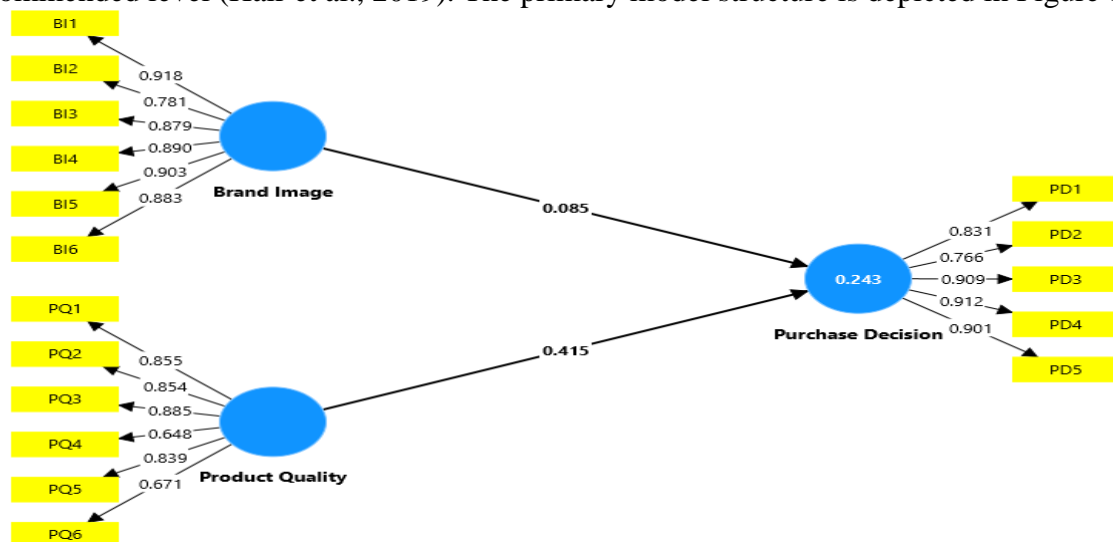


Figure 1: Initial Framework

Unnecessary components with very low loadings were removed to address model inefficiencies (see Figure 1). However, improvements were needed for constructs like "product quality." Two models were developed: the first served as the main framework for generating recommendations related to Malaysian consumers' purchasing decisions. The second model, depicted in Figure 2, was optimized with fewer indicators and met all PLS-SEM criteria, making it statistically ideal. The final measurement model was used for subsequent findings, recommendations, and discussions.

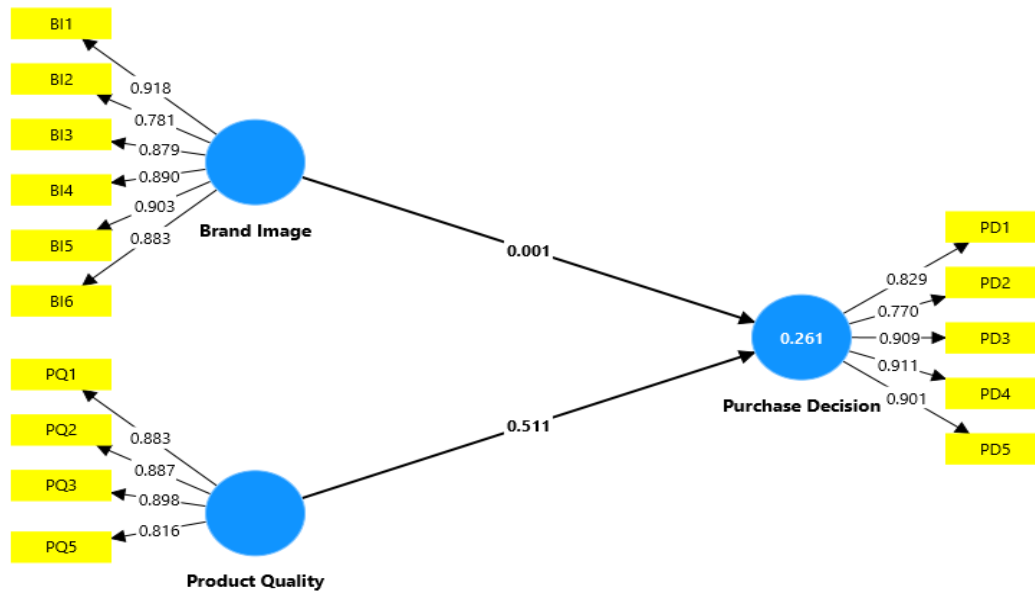


Figure 2: Final Research Framework

Assessment Structural Model

The structural model was assessed after the measurement model evaluation to test the hypotheses. This involved analysing multicollinearity, t-statistics, path coefficients, R² (coefficient of determination), f² (effect size), and Q² (predictive significance). Multicollinearity was evaluated using the variance inflation factor (VIF), as shown in Table 2.

Table 1
Multicollinearity Test

	VIF
Brand Image1	4.096
Brand Image2	2.042
Brand Image3	3.284
Brand Image4	3.713
Brand Image5	4.309
Brand Image6	3.382
Purchase Decision1	2.526
Purchase Decision2	1.953
Purchase Decision3	3.498
Purchase Decision4	3.875
Purchase Decision5	3.154
Product Quality1	2.475
Product Quality2	2.734
Product Quality3	2.975
Product Quality5	2.106

The variance inflation factor (VIF) assessment shown in Table 2, revealed that all values were below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues within the dataset. This threshold aligns with the criteria established by Hair et al. (2017). Following this, bootstrapping was performed using 5,000 replicate samples and a 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap method.

Table 2

Hypothesis Testing

H No.	Path (relationships)	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STD EV)	p values	Decision	R ²	Q ²
H1	BI -> PD	0.001	0.000	0.095	0.008	0.994	Rejected	.261	0.214
H2	PQ ->PD	0.511	0.516	0.143	3.570	0.000	Supported		

Table 3 indicates that all hypotheses were evaluated based on the standard p-value threshold of 0.05. The structural model demonstrates both the direct effects of the relationships and their significance through t-values and p-values. The results reveal that brand image has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase decisions (BI → PU: $\beta = .001$, $P = 0.994$). Conversely, product quality has a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions (PQ → PU: $\beta = .511$, $P < 0.05$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 shows a positive but insignificant relationship between brand image and purchase decisions among Malaysian consumers, while Hypothesis 2 confirms a positive and significant relationship between product quality and purchase decisions. The R-squared (R²) value represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. For studies involving multiple independent variables, the adjusted R² should be considered, as it accounts for the number of predictors and is always less than the R² value (Purwanto et al., 2021). Following Hair et al. (2017), this study examined the coefficient of determination (R²), effect size (f²), and predictive relevance (Q²). The R² value indicates that 26% of the variation in purchase decisions is explained by the independent variable, while the remaining 74% is attributed to other factors. This result is deemed satisfactory based on established benchmarks: R² values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 correspond to weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively (Hair et al., 2013), while Chin (1998) categorizes R² values below 0.19 as weak, 0.33 as moderate, and above 0.67 as substantial. The model's predictive power was further evaluated using the blindfolding method (PLSpredict in SmartPLS 4.1). The Q² value for purchase decisions was found to be greater than zero, indicating predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017). Q² values above zero confirm the model's predictive significance, whereas values below zero suggest the absence of such relevance. Consequently, the findings affirm the model's strong predictive power. Based on these analyses, the study concludes that the exploration was both successful and satisfactory.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The study examined the impact of brand image and product quality on purchase decisions for premium coffee in Malaysia. Hypothesis 1, which posited a significant relationship between brand image and purchase decision, was rejected as results indicated a statistically insignificant and negative relationship (BI -> PD: $\beta = .001$, $P > 0.05$). These findings challenge prior research emphasizing the importance of brand image in fostering loyalty and trust (Ali et al., 2021). The diminishing influence of brand image may be attributed to growing consumer selectivity, economic factors, and the prevalence of local and international brand alternatives. Younger Malaysian consumers prioritize practical benefits such as product quality and cost over brand identity, while economic pressures and user-generated content further shift purchasing decisions toward perceived value and peer recommendations (Kumar & Abdullah,

2023; Lee & Chua, 2023). Conversely, Hypothesis 2 was supported, revealing a significant positive relationship between product quality and purchase decision (PQ → PD: $\beta = .511$, $P < 0.05$). This aligns with existing research highlighting the critical role of durability, functionality, and performance in shaping consumer satisfaction and repeat purchases (Lim et al., 2021). Malaysian consumers, increasingly quality-conscious, favour premium products even at higher costs when they perceive superior quality, reflecting cultural preferences for trust and reliability in products (Hofstede, 2021). The study underscores the strategic importance of consistent product quality for businesses in Malaysia's premium coffee sector, as it fosters loyalty, mitigates post-purchase regret, and aligns with evolving consumer expectations (Ali & Lim, 2022).

This study provides significant theoretical and practical implications for understanding consumer behaviour and improving business strategies. The findings challenge the universal applicability of brand image as a predictor of purchase decisions, emphasizing the need for consumer behaviour theories to incorporate cultural and contextual factors. This highlights that the relative importance of product quality and brand image may vary across markets, particularly in Malaysia, where practical considerations appear to outweigh traditional brand perceptions.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the necessity for coffee companies in Malaysia to prioritize product quality to influence consumer choices effectively. Investments in quality control, product development, and customer feedback mechanisms can help meet consumer expectations and foster long-term loyalty. While brand image remains a critical element of marketing strategy, it must be complemented with tangible efforts to enhance product performance, reliability, and value. This dual approach can enable businesses to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

The research reveals a pivotal shift in Malaysian consumer priorities, where product quality significantly impacts purchase decisions for premium coffee, while brand image holds little sway. This finding contrasts with traditional marketing theories that emphasize brand image as a key driver of consumer behaviour. The diminishing influence of brand image in the Malaysian context could be attributed to economic factors, heightened consumer awareness, and the growing reliance on peer reviews and user-generated content. These insights suggest that Malaysian consumers are more discerning, focusing on tangible product attributes such as functionality, durability, and satisfaction, particularly in economically sensitive times.

For businesses in Malaysia's premium coffee sector, the implications are clear: to remain competitive, product quality must take precedence. Brand image, while still relevant, should be reinforced through consistent improvements in product attributes to build trust and loyalty among consumers. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring additional factors such as price sensitivity, social influences, and digital engagement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Malaysian consumer behaviour. By aligning business strategies with these evolving consumer priorities, companies can better navigate the dynamic market landscape and achieve sustained success.

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