



Constructing Customer Loyalty Beyond Satisfaction: The Interplay of Brand Meaning and Servicescape Experience in the Coffee Shop Industry

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Abstract

The increasing competition in the coffee shop industry has intensified the need to understand customer loyalty beyond satisfaction with individual service encounters. This study examines how customer loyalty is constructed through the interplay between brand meaning and servicescape experience at Sukaluyu Coffee in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Adopting a qualitative interpretive case study design, the study collected primary data through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, complemented by documentary evidence concerning the coffee shop's brand identity and physical environment. Data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, categorization, theme development, thematic review, and interpretation, with triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail supporting analytical trustworthiness. The findings reveal four interconnected themes: brand meaning as a personally relevant experience, servicescape as a lived experience, brand-servicescape congruence as an interpretive mechanism, and customer loyalty beyond satisfaction. Customers constructed loyalty through accumulated experiences in which personal meanings, recurring activities, familiarity, and environmental experiences became interconnected. Brand-servicescape congruence strengthened perceptions of coherence between what the coffee shop represented and what customers experienced, supporting sustained preference and continued patronage. The study contributes to coffee shop and customer loyalty research by extending satisfaction-oriented perspectives toward a meaning-experience framework in which loyalty develops through personally relevant brand meanings and coherent servicescape experiences. The framework is interpretive and does not imply statistically tested causal relationships.

Keywords: Brand Meaning, Brand-Servicescape Congruence, Coffee Shop, Customer Loyalty, Servicescape Experience.



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INTRODUCTION

The coffee shop industry has evolved from a product-oriented market into an experience-oriented environment in which customers consume not only coffee products but also social, functional, and symbolic experiences. Coffee shops increasingly serve as places for interaction, work, study, relaxation, meetings, and leisure activities, making the overall consumption environment an increasingly important component of customers' evaluations and behavioral responses. Recent research indicates that contemporary coffee shop consumers, particularly younger consumer segments, evaluate establishments through combinations of product attributes, atmosphere, service, convenience, identity, and experiential considerations rather than through beverage quality alone (Muflikh et al., 2024). The increasing complexity of these consumption motives has intensified competition because many coffee shops offer relatively similar products, prices, menus, services, and promotional activities, while consumers can easily move between competing establishments. Research on coffee shop consumers has similarly demonstrated that product quality, price, atmosphere, and service remain important considerations in purchase decisions, but these attributes operate within a broader competitive environment in which experiential differentiation becomes increasingly consequential (Wicaksono et al., 2026). From a branding perspective, differentiation is not restricted to functional product attributes because brands acquire value through meanings that consumers associate with their identities, experiences, and consumption contexts (Firmansyah, 2019). Customer loyalty consequently becomes an important strategic outcome because it reflects sustained preference and behavioral commitment

toward a particular coffee shop despite the availability of alternative choices (Song et al., 2019; Dhisasmitho & Kumar, 2020).

Customer loyalty, however, should be distinguished from customer satisfaction because satisfaction generally represents an evaluation of a particular consumption experience, whereas loyalty reflects a more enduring preference or commitment toward a particular organization. A customer may be highly satisfied with a single visit but have no compelling reason to return, while another customer may continue visiting a particular coffee shop because accumulated experiences have created personal meaning, attachment, trust, and preference. Previous research has shown that loyalty in the coffee shop industry can emerge from an interconnected set of factors, including image, satisfaction, trust, love, respect, and other relational evaluations rather than from satisfaction in isolation (Song et al., 2019). Evidence from service research also indicates that customer satisfaction may function as an important mechanism linking service quality to loyalty, reinforcing the dominant tendency to conceptualize loyalty as a downstream behavioral consequence of favorable evaluations (Rambe & Khairani, 2025). Research specifically examining coffee shops has further identified customer experience as an important determinant of revisit intentions, suggesting that repeated patronage may depend on how customers interpret the totality of their encounters rather than merely on whether individual transactions meet expectations (Hanafi et al., 2025). Brand experience has likewise been associated with brand satisfaction, brand attitude, brand attachment, and brand loyalty, indicating that affective and experiential relationships can extend beyond immediate transactional evaluations (Hwang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, explaining loyalty primarily through satisfaction and conventional evaluative constructs may not fully capture why customers repeatedly choose one coffee shop over competing alternatives, particularly when competing establishments provide comparable functional benefits.

One important dimension in explaining this deeper process is brand meaning, which concerns how customers personally interpret and attach significance to a brand through experiences, memories, consumption practices, and interactions. Customers do not necessarily understand a coffee shop solely according to meanings communicated by the company; instead, meanings can develop through repeated encounters and become associated with lifestyles, routines, social activities, work or study practices, leisure preferences, and interactions with other customers. This perspective is consistent with research demonstrating that brand image can influence loyalty while also interacting with satisfaction in shaping customers' behavioral responses, although such relationships are frequently examined through predetermined causal models rather than through customers' own interpretations of brand meaning (Hidayah & Putranto, 2025). Studies of coffee shop consumers further indicate that purchasing decisions and preferences differ across contemporary consumer groups, highlighting the importance of understanding the symbolic and experiential dimensions that accompany functional evaluations of coffee shop offerings (Zamborita et al., 2024). A coffee shop may therefore represent more than a place to purchase beverages; it may become associated with particular identities, activities, emotions, memories, or personal routines that make repeated patronage meaningful. Existing research on brand equity in the Starbucks context reinforces the relevance of brand-related perceptions in shaping consumer responses, although brand equity research does not necessarily explain how customers construct those meanings through everyday physical encounters with the brand (Ren et al., 2023). Understanding customer loyalty therefore requires attention to the meanings customers construct around a coffee shop brand rather than focusing exclusively on whether they evaluate the brand positively.

Another important dimension is the servicescape experience, which concerns the physical and sensory environment through which customers encounter a service organization. Bitner's foundational servicescape framework established that physical environmental conditions can influence customers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses, providing an important theoretical basis for examining the role of environmental experience in service settings (Bitner, 1992). In a coffee shop context, servicescape encompasses spatial layout, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, temperature, music, décor, facilities, and other physical attributes that collectively shape how customers experience the consumption setting. Empirical research has demonstrated that servicescape can influence satisfaction and behavioral intentions, particularly because environmental cues affect customers' perceptions of comfort, attractiveness, functionality, and experiential quality (Peng et al., 2020). Research in coffee shop settings has also found that servicescape can contribute to customer satisfaction and repurchase intention, indicating that physical surroundings have consequences extending beyond aesthetic

appreciation (Al-Ghifari & Fachira, 2021). Similar evidence shows that servicescape, together with product innovation, may influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction, while other studies have connected servicescape and brand image with satisfaction, suggesting that environmental and brand-related evaluations can operate simultaneously (Gani et al., 2022; Nurani et al., 2022). Yet customers do not experience physical elements independently from the meanings they associate with a coffee shop brand, raising a conceptual issue that cannot be adequately addressed when servicescape is treated merely as an inventory of environmental attributes.

The interaction between these two dimensions gives rise to the concept of brand–servicescape congruence, through which customers may evaluate whether the physical environment is consistent with what the coffee shop brand means to them. Customers encounter a coffee shop brand through both intangible meanings and tangible environmental experiences, and they may develop expectations concerning the type of environment that should represent or support those meanings. Research on customer loyalty has demonstrated the importance of physical environment and satisfaction in explaining loyalty within hospitality settings, yet the physical environment is commonly conceptualized as an antecedent rather than as an experiential expression of brand meaning (Han & Ryu, 2009). Related evidence from coffee shop research indicates that servicescape and brand image can both contribute to customer satisfaction, but the relationship between what customers believe a brand represents and what they physically encounter remains insufficiently theorized (Zienri et al., 2025). The actual servicescape may consequently be perceived as consistent or inconsistent with the meaning customers have attributed to the brand, and this perceived consistency may influence whether the overall experience feels coherent, distinctive, and personally relevant. The importance of relational and experiential mechanisms is also reflected in contemporary customer relationship management research, which emphasizes the need for coffee shops to develop sustained relationships rather than relying exclusively on individual transactions (Indhira et al., 2026). Brand–servicescape congruence in this study therefore refers to customers’ perceived consistency between the meaning they associate with a coffee shop brand and the servicescape experience through which they encounter that brand, positioning congruence as an interpretive mechanism through which symbolic meaning and physical experience may become integrated.

Although previous empirical studies have provided substantial evidence regarding relationships among brand image, servicescape, satisfaction, experience, and customer loyalty, an important conceptual and empirical gap remains. Much of the existing literature examines these constructs as relatively separate variables and focuses on whether brand image or servicescape influences satisfaction, behavioral intention, or loyalty, leaving less attention to the interpretive processes through which customers connect symbolic meanings with physical experiences. The persistence of this fragmented approach is particularly evident in research that models servicescape, product quality, brand image, satisfaction, and loyalty as discrete variables, even though customers encounter these dimensions simultaneously during actual consumption experiences. A further limitation concerns the methodological tendency to privilege measurable relationships between predefined constructs, which can restrict the ability of research to capture how customers themselves explain why particular coffee shops become meaningful and worthy of repeated patronage; qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate when the research objective concerns meanings, experiences, interpretations, and contextual processes (Sugiyono, 2022). The broader Indonesian business literature also illustrates how organizational and market mechanisms can shape managerial decision-making, reinforcing the need to examine consumer-oriented strategies within their wider business context rather than treating individual variables as isolated determinants (Marlina et al., 2023). This study responds to the unresolved problem by adopting a qualitative interpretive perspective that examines customer loyalty as an experiential and meaning-based process rather than merely as a consequence of satisfaction. It aims to explore how customers construct meanings around coffee shop brands, how they experience and interpret servicescape, how they perceive congruence or incongruence between brand meaning and servicescape, and how these interpretations contribute to sustained preference and loyalty, thereby contributing theoretically by extending loyalty research beyond satisfaction-centered explanations and methodologically by providing an interpretive account of the relationship between symbolic brand meaning and physical service experience.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is empirical in nature because it obtains primary data directly from customers' experiences and perceptions through interviews, observations, and documentation at Sukaluyu Coffee. The study adopts a qualitative interpretive case study design to explore how customers construct brand meaning, experience the servicescape, and connect these experiences in developing sustained preference and customer loyalty without testing predetermined causal relationships. Sukaluyu Coffee was selected as the research setting because a coffee shop represents a consumption environment in which customers interact with the brand, physical surroundings, products, and other customers as part of their overall consumption experience. The unit of analysis is the customer experience encompassing brand meaning, servicescape experience, brand-servicescape congruence, sustained preference, and customer loyalty, while customer satisfaction is considered as a contextual dimension for understanding loyalty beyond satisfaction (Dhisasmitho & Kumar, 2020). Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience visiting Sukaluyu Coffee, exposure to its products and physical environment, and willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews, while variation in customer engagement was considered to obtain diverse perspectives (Sugiyono, 2022). Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, while supporting secondary data were obtained from photographs and relevant documents concerning the coffee shop's brand identity and physical environment.

Data collection employed open-ended interview questions addressing customers' understanding of brand meaning, experiences of the servicescape, perceived congruence between brand meaning and physical surroundings, reasons for choosing the coffee shop, activities during visits, and factors underlying sustained preference and loyalty. The measurement procedure did not employ numerical scales or standardized quantitative instruments but instead used an interview protocol, observation guidelines, coding categories, and documentary evidence to systematically capture participants' experiences and interpretations. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through six stages consisting of data familiarization, initial coding, categorization, theme development, thematic review, and interpretation, with the coding process focusing on brand meaning, servicescape experience, brand-servicescape congruence, sustained preference, and customer loyalty. This interpretive analytical approach was selected because servicescape experiences may contribute to customer responses through perceptions of the physical environment and satisfaction rather than through a purely observable transactional mechanism (Han & Ryu, 2009). Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail, with triangulation comparing interview, observation, and documentary evidence, member checking verifying the accuracy of participants' interpreted accounts, and the audit trail documenting the research and analytical procedures. The final interpretation integrated the four emergent themes—brand meaning experiences, servicescape experiences, brand-servicescape congruence, and customer loyalty beyond satisfaction—to explain how the interaction between brand meaning and servicescape experience contributes to sustained preference and loyalty, consistent with evidence that brand-related experiences can contribute to the development of brand loyalty in coffee shop contexts (Han et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brand Meaning as a Personally Relevant Experience

The qualitative analysis indicates that brand meaning at Sukaluyu Coffee was constructed through customers' personal experiences rather than received solely from formal brand communication. Participants associated the coffee shop with comfort, personal preferences, recurring routines, social encounters, work, study, and leisure activities, suggesting that the brand acquired significance through repeated engagement with the consumption setting. These interpretations indicate that customers did not understand the brand merely as a name, logo, or product offering, but as an experience embedded in their everyday activities. Brand meaning therefore emerged through an interaction between brand-related cues and customers' individual experiences, allowing the same coffee shop to carry different meanings for different customers. This interpretation is consistent with the view that brand meaning and associations contribute to how consumers perceive and evaluate a brand within their consumption experiences (Firmansyah, 2019). The finding also corresponds with research in the coffee shop industry showing that brand-related experiences and perceptions can become important foundations for developing brand loyalty (Han et al., 2018).

The interview evidence was reinforced by non-participant observations and documentary materials, which provided contextual support for understanding how customers constructed personal meanings around the coffee shop. Interviews revealed that customers connected Sukaluyu Coffee with particular activities and preferences, while observations showed that the setting was used for working, studying, socializing, informal meetings, and leisure rather than exclusively for purchasing and consuming beverages. Documentary materials, including photographs and brand-related visual elements, further indicated the presence of environmental and symbolic cues through which customers could interpret the character of the coffee shop. The convergence of these sources is presented in Table 1, which shows that brand meaning was synthesized from the relationship between customer interpretations, observed activities, and documented brand characteristics.

Table 1. Triangulation of Interview, Observation, and Documentation Findings

Theme	Interview Findings	Observation Findings	Documentation Findings
Brand Meaning	Customers associated the coffee shop with activities, personal preferences, comfort, and frequent visitation. The coffee shop was used for various activities, ranging from casual gatherings to work and leisure.	Customers used the coffee shop for different purposes, including social interaction, working, studying, and spending leisure time. These activities contributed to the way customers experienced and interpreted the coffee shop.	Brand-related materials revealed the brand meaning and its visual representation, providing contextual evidence of the brand cues communicated through the coffee shop environment.
Servicescape Experience	Customers described their experiences in relation to spatial layout, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, decoration, comfort, and ambience. These physical elements were experienced as part of the overall environment rather than as isolated attributes.	The physical environment consisted of specific spatial arrangements, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, decoration, and ambience that supported customers' activities and interactions.	Photographs and other visual materials documented the physical characteristics of the servicescape and provided evidence of the environmental elements experienced by customers.
Brand–Servicescape Congruence	Customers described consistency between the meaning they attributed to the brand and the servicescape they experienced. The physical environment provided a context through which perceived brand values became tangible.	The physical environment reflected and reinforced several characteristics associated with the perceived brand meaning, creating consistency between brand expectations and actual experience.	Comparison of brand-related materials with the physical environment provided supporting evidence of the consistency between brand meaning and servicescape characteristics.
Sustained Preference	Customers associated their preference with reasons for returning and choosing the coffee shop over alternatives.	Recurrent visits and the variety of activities undertaken by customers indicated that the environment	Visual and brand-related materials provided contextual evidence of the role of the brand and

	Repeated visits were related to familiarity, comfort, meaningful activities, and accumulated experiences.	contributed to environment in maintaining their shaping customers' preference for the experiences over time.	
Customer Loyalty Beyond Satisfaction	Customers associated loyalty with meaning, familiarity, consistency, personal relevance, and reasons for choosing the coffee shop over other alternatives. Their preference extended beyond satisfaction with a single service encounter.	Continued interaction with the environment indicated that the coffee shop fulfilled customers' experiential and social purposes beyond the immediate delivery of products or services.	Documentation of brand-related materials and the physical environment supported the interpretation that the coffee shop delivered an experience consistent with its perceived brand meaning.

The pattern presented in Table 1 suggests that brand meaning was inseparable from the ways customers used and experienced the coffee shop. A customer who associated the setting with studying, for example, could interpret the brand through attributes such as comfort, concentration, familiarity, and functional suitability, whereas another customer could construct meaning through social interaction or leisure. Such variation demonstrates that brand meaning was not uniform across participants but was shaped by the relationship between individual needs and the experiential context provided by the coffee shop. The finding supports the argument that consumer perceptions of coffee shops involve more than product selection because purchasing decisions can be influenced by personal preferences and the purposes associated with visiting the establishment (Muflikh et al., 2024). Brand meaning consequently became personally relevant when customers could integrate the coffee shop into activities that were significant within their own routines. This process helps explain why repeated interaction with a coffee shop may strengthen preference even when customers encounter alternative establishments offering comparable products.

The empirical pattern further indicates that personal relevance developed through the accumulation of experiences rather than through a single encounter. Repeated visits allowed customers to develop familiarity with the setting, recognize environmental cues, establish routines, and associate the coffee shop with particular memories or activities. The brand consequently functioned as an experiential reference point through which customers interpreted their interactions with the coffee shop over time. This finding is compatible with evidence that brand equity in the coffee industry can be shaped by antecedents related to consumers' perceptions and experiences with a coffee brand (Ren et al., 2023). It also complements findings that brand experience can contribute to brand satisfaction, attitude, attachment, and loyalty by demonstrating that customers' interpretations of the brand may become embedded within their recurring consumption practices (Hwang et al., 2021). From an interpretive perspective, the importance of brand meaning therefore lies not simply in positive evaluation but in the degree to which the brand becomes connected with personally meaningful experiences.

The findings also indicate that personally relevant brand meaning provides an important interpretive foundation for understanding customer loyalty beyond satisfaction. Customers' continued preference could not be reduced to whether a particular transaction produced a satisfactory outcome because their relationship with the coffee shop incorporated familiarity, accumulated experiences, personal routines, and perceived relevance. This distinction is important in the coffee shop context, where customers may select establishments not only because of product or service performance but also because of the broader experience associated with the place. Previous research has identified image, satisfaction, trust, love, and respect as factors involved in loyalty formation among name-brand coffee shops, demonstrating that loyalty can involve multiple affective and cognitive dimensions beyond immediate service evaluation (Song et al., 2019). Research on coffee shop customer behavior likewise

indicates that loyalty is connected with a broader set of customer-related factors rather than a single transactional evaluation (Suryadi, 2023). The present finding extends this perspective by showing qualitatively how brand meaning becomes personally embedded in customers' experiences and subsequently supports sustained preference.

The theoretical significance of the finding lies in positioning brand meaning as an interpretive phenomenon that develops through customer–brand interaction within a specific consumption environment. Rather than treating brand meaning as an externally controlled managerial output, the evidence indicates that customers actively construct and reconstruct what the coffee shop represents through their activities, experiences, and accumulated interactions. This perspective complements the established emphasis on brand image and brand-related associations while placing greater analytical attention on customers' lived experiences. The finding is also relevant to loyalty research because a personally meaningful brand can become difficult to substitute when customers value the accumulated experiences associated with it, even when competing coffee shops offer similar functional benefits. Evidence concerning product quality and brand image similarly indicates that brand-related perceptions can contribute to customer loyalty across consumer contexts (Suganda et al., 2021). The results therefore establish the conceptual basis for examining servicescape as the experiential context through which personally constructed brand meaning becomes tangible and potentially contributes to sustained customer preference.

Servicescape as a Lived Experience

The findings indicate that customers experienced the servicescape of Sukaluyu Coffee as a holistic environment rather than as a collection of independent physical attributes. Interview participants referred to spatial layout, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, decoration, comfort, and ambience when explaining their experiences within the coffee shop. These elements were interpreted collectively because their meaning depended on how customers used the space for working, studying, socializing, meeting others, or spending leisure time. Observations supported this interpretation by showing that the physical arrangement accommodated different forms of customer engagement and created opportunities for individual and interpersonal activities. This finding is consistent with the servicescape perspective, which positions the physical environment as an important contextual factor influencing customers' internal responses and behavioral outcomes (Han & Ryu, 2009). Previous research in coffee shop settings also demonstrates that servicescape characteristics can influence customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, indicating that the physical environment forms an important component of the consumption experience (Al-Ghifari & Fachira, 2021).

The lived character of the servicescape became apparent from the way customers interpreted the physical environment according to their individual activities and purposes. Furniture, lighting, spatial organization, cleanliness, and ambience were not evaluated as isolated attributes but as interconnected elements that determined whether the environment was suitable for particular forms of engagement. A seating arrangement, for example, could facilitate social interaction for one customer while providing an appropriate setting for studying or working for another. Such differences indicate that the meaning of servicescape is partly generated through customer–environment interaction rather than being completely predetermined by managerial design. The interpretive relationship between the environment and customer activities is summarized in Table 2, which maps the progression from servicescape experience to sustained preference and customer loyalty.

Table 2. Interpretive Summary of Themes in Relation to Customer Loyalty

Analytical Process	Customer Interpretation	Emerging Meaning
Brand Meaning	“What does this coffee shop mean to me?”	Personal relevance
Servicescape Experience	“How do I experience this place?”	Lived experience
Brand–Servicescape Congruence	“Does this environment fit what this brand means to me?”	Coherence and consistency
Sustained Preference	“Why do I continue choosing this place?”	Distinctive and meaningful preference

Customer Loyalty	“Why do I remain with this coffee shop despite alternatives?”	Sustained loyalty beyond satisfaction
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The interpretive structure in Table 2 indicates that servicescape experience represents a lived dimension through which customers attach meaning to the coffee shop environment. Customers first encounter the physical setting through their sensory and functional experiences, but these experiences become more significant when connected to activities, preferences, and personal expectations. The servicescape therefore operates as a context that enables customers to transform physical characteristics into subjective experiences. This interpretation extends the conventional view of servicescape by emphasizing that its influence depends on how customers experience and use the environment. Research on integrated hospitality environments similarly demonstrates that servicescape can affect satisfaction and behavioral intentions through customers’ evaluations of the physical setting (Peng et al., 2020). The present findings provide a qualitative explanation of this process by showing that the environmental experience becomes meaningful when it supports activities that customers consider personally relevant.

The findings further demonstrate that the servicescape contributed to the accumulation of experiences across repeated visits. Customers who repeatedly encountered a familiar spatial configuration could develop expectations concerning comfort, functionality, ambience, and suitability for particular activities. Such familiarity transformed the physical environment from a temporary setting into a recognizable part of the customer experience. Recurrent interaction also allowed customers to develop personal routines, such as using particular areas for work, study, social interaction, or leisure. This pattern corresponds with research showing that customer experience in specialty coffee shops can influence intentions to revisit by creating experiential value beyond the immediate product transaction (Hanafi et al., 2025). The current findings indicate that repeated exposure to the servicescape may reinforce preference because customers become familiar with an environment that accommodates their established activities and expectations.

The servicescape also demonstrated an important connection between functional utility and experiential value. Physical features such as furniture, cleanliness, lighting, decoration, and spatial organization provided functional support, while their integrated configuration generated perceptions of comfort, atmosphere, and appropriateness. Customers therefore did not necessarily attach loyalty to a single physical characteristic, but rather to the experience created through the interaction of multiple environmental elements. This interpretation is relevant to coffee shop research because purchasing and consumption decisions can be influenced by atmosphere and other environmental conditions alongside product and service considerations (Wicaksono et al., 2026). It also complements evidence that servicescape can influence customer loyalty through customer satisfaction, while suggesting that the experiential pathway may involve meanings that are not fully captured by satisfaction measures (Gani et al., 2022). The servicescape consequently becomes an experiential resource through which customers develop perceptions of familiarity, comfort, and personal relevance.

Theoretically, the findings position servicescape as a lived experience that contributes to customer preference through customers’ interpretations of the physical environment. The environment is not simply a managerial instrument designed to produce favorable evaluations, but a social and experiential context in which customers perform activities and develop personal associations. This perspective is consistent with the foundational servicescape framework, which recognizes that physical surroundings influence customer responses through their perceptions and experiences of the service environment (Han & Ryu, 2009). The present study extends that perspective by connecting the lived servicescape directly to brand meaning and subsequent loyalty formation. When customers perceive the environment as suitable for activities that are personally meaningful, the servicescape can become incorporated into their understanding of the coffee shop itself. This experiential connection provides the basis for the next analytical dimension, namely the extent to which the meaning of the brand is perceived as coherent with the servicescape encountered by customers.

Brand–Servicescape Congruence as an Interpretive Mechanism

The findings indicate that brand–servicescape congruence emerged when customers perceived consistency between what Sukaluyu Coffee represented to them and what they actually experienced within its physical environment. Participants did not evaluate brand meaning and servicescape as two independent dimensions, but interpreted environmental characteristics through the meanings they had

already attached to the coffee shop. The physical setting consequently became a tangible context through which abstract perceptions of the brand could be experienced and evaluated. When environmental cues were perceived as consistent with customers' understanding of the brand, the coffee shop was experienced as more coherent and personally meaningful. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that servicescape and brand image can jointly shape customer evaluations and satisfaction (Nurani et al., 2022). It also extends research on brand experience by demonstrating that the relationship between brand-related perceptions and customer responses can be understood through the interaction between symbolic meaning and physical experience (Hwang et al., 2021).

The interview data showed that customers perceived congruence through their assessment of whether the physical environment corresponded with the character and meaning they associated with the coffee shop. Observational evidence complemented these accounts by indicating that spatial arrangements, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, decoration, and ambience created an environmental context that either reinforced or weakened particular brand associations. Documentary evidence further supported the interpretation by providing visual information concerning the relationship between the coffee shop's brand-related identity and its physical surroundings. The convergence of these sources demonstrates that congruence was not established by one environmental attribute, but through the perceived consistency among multiple experiential cues. Table 3 presents the interpretive relationship between the principal dimensions identified in the empirical evidence and their contribution to perceived brand–servicescape congruence.

Table 3. Interpretive Relationship between Brand Meaning and Servicescape Experience

Brand Meaning Dimension	Servicescape Evidence	Customer Interpretation	Contribution to Congruence
Personal Relevance	Spatial arrangements and facilities accommodate individual activities	The environment supports customers' personal routines and preferences	Brand becomes personally meaningful through environmental experience
Comfort and Familiarity	Furniture, cleanliness, ambience, and spatial organization provide a recognizable setting	Customers perceive the coffee shop as comfortable and familiar	Environmental consistency reinforces established brand associations
Social and Leisure Meaning	Seating arrangements and ambience facilitate interaction and leisure activities	Customers associate the coffee shop with social and recreational experiences	Servicescape reinforces the social character attributed to the brand
Work and Study Meaning	Functional seating, spatial organization, and environmental conditions support focused activities	Customers perceive the coffee shop as suitable for working or studying	Physical environment strengthens functional associations with the brand

The pattern in Table 3 demonstrates that congruence was primarily experiential rather than merely visual. Customers could perceive alignment between brand and servicescape when the environment enabled activities that were consistent with the meaning they attributed to the coffee shop. This means that a visually distinctive environment would not necessarily produce strong congruence if it failed to support the activities or expectations associated with the brand. The findings therefore position servicescape as a medium through which brand meaning becomes observable and practically experienced by customers. This interpretation is compatible with evidence that servicescape influences customer responses through perceptions of physical surroundings and their consequences for satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Peng et al., 2020). In the coffee shop context, congruence appears to emerge when environmental functionality, atmosphere, and symbolic cues collectively support the meaning customers associate with the establishment.

The analysis further suggests that brand–servicescape congruence operated as an interpretive mechanism rather than as a simple matching process between predetermined brand attributes and physical design elements. Customers interpreted the environment according to their existing

experiences, expectations, and purposes for visiting the coffee shop. A particular spatial feature could therefore reinforce different dimensions of brand meaning depending on how customers used and experienced it. This finding is important because it indicates that congruence was co-constructed through customer–environment interaction rather than produced exclusively through managerial decisions. Research on coffee shop loyalty has demonstrated that brand-related factors such as image, trust, satisfaction, love, and respect contribute to loyalty formation, while the present findings clarify how the physical environment can participate in the construction of those brand-related experiences (Song et al., 2019). Congruence consequently represents a dynamic relationship in which brand meaning influences environmental interpretation while environmental experience can reinforce or modify brand meaning.

The interpretive mechanism identified in the data can be further understood through the sequence connecting customer perception, environmental experience, and sustained preference. Customers entered the coffee shop with meanings and expectations developed from previous interactions, encountered the physical environment, evaluated its consistency with those meanings, and incorporated the experience into their continuing perception of the brand. When the experience remained coherent across visits, familiarity and confidence in the coffee shop increased, providing a basis for sustained preference. Table 4 summarizes this mechanism by distinguishing the experiential stage, interpretive process, and resulting customer meaning identified through the qualitative analysis.

Table 4. Interpretive Mechanism of Brand–Servicescape Congruence

Experiential Stage	Interpretive Process	Resulting Customer Meaning
Existing Brand Meaning	Customers bring prior perceptions, preferences, and expectations to the coffee shop	Personal expectations about what the coffee shop represents
Servicescape Encounter	Customers experience spatial, visual, functional, and atmospheric elements	Lived experience of the physical environment
Perceived Congruence	Customers compare the experienced environment with their understanding of the brand	Coherence between brand meaning and physical experience
Meaningful Experience	Consistent brand and environmental cues reinforce personal relevance and familiarity	Stronger experiential attachment to the coffee shop
Sustained Preference	Accumulated coherent experiences influence continued choice	Distinctive and meaningful preference
Loyalty Beyond Satisfaction	Continued preference becomes embedded in customers' broader relationship with the coffee shop	Sustained loyalty that is not dependent on a single satisfactory encounter

The mechanism shown in Table 4 indicates that brand–servicescape congruence represents the central interpretive link between what customers believe a coffee shop represents and how they experience it as a physical and social environment. The process is not necessarily linear because previous servicescape experiences can also reshape subsequent interpretations of brand meaning. Such reciprocal interaction is particularly relevant in coffee shops, where customers frequently revisit the same establishment and encounter recurring environmental and experiential cues. The resulting coherence can strengthen the distinctiveness of the coffee shop in customers' minds and make its experience more difficult to substitute with competing establishments. This interpretation complements research showing that brand experience contributes to brand attitude, attachment, and loyalty, while providing a more contextual explanation of how the physical environment participates in that process (Hwang et al., 2021). It also corresponds with findings that customers' preferences in coffee shops are

shaped by multiple experiential and consumption considerations rather than by product characteristics alone (Zamborita et al., 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, brand–servicescape congruence can therefore be understood as an emergent mechanism through which symbolic brand meaning and physical service experience become integrated. The contribution of the present findings lies in moving beyond the assumption that brand image and servicescape simply exert separate influences on customer responses. Instead, the evidence suggests that customers interpret one through the other, producing a coherent experience that can accumulate across repeated interactions. This perspective is compatible with prior findings linking servicescape, brand image, and customer evaluations, while emphasizing the interpretive process connecting these dimensions (Nurani et al., 2022). It also provides a stronger explanation for sustained preference because coherence between brand meaning and environmental experience gives customers a reason to value the coffee shop as a distinctive place rather than merely as a provider of beverages. The next analytical dimension therefore concerns how this accumulated coherence contributes to customer loyalty that extends beyond satisfaction with individual service encounters.

Customer Loyalty Beyond Satisfaction

The final theme indicates that customer loyalty at Sukaluyu Coffee was constructed through accumulated experiences that extended beyond satisfaction with individual transactions. Participants associated continued preference with familiarity, personal relevance, consistency, meaningful activities, and the distinctive experience provided by the coffee shop. Loyalty was therefore reflected not only in the intention to return but also in the continuing attachment to a place that had become relevant to customers' routines and experiences. The findings indicate that satisfaction remained an important contextual element, yet it did not fully explain why customers maintained their preference when alternative coffee shops were available. This interpretation is consistent with research demonstrating that coffee shop loyalty involves multiple factors, including image, satisfaction, trust, love, and respect (Song et al., 2019). It also corresponds with evidence that customer loyalty in the coffee shop industry is influenced by broader experiential and relational considerations beyond a single service encounter (Dhisasmito & Kumar, 2020).

The interview evidence showed that customers described loyalty through their reasons for repeatedly choosing Sukaluyu Coffee, including comfort, familiarity, personal routines, and meaningful experiences accumulated through previous visits. Observations provided contextual evidence by showing that customers returned to the coffee shop for activities such as working, studying, socializing, and leisure, indicating that the establishment fulfilled purposes beyond the immediate purchase of food and beverages. Documentary evidence complemented these findings by confirming the continuity between the coffee shop's brand-related cues and the physical environment experienced by customers. The three sources therefore indicate that loyalty developed through an integrated customer experience rather than through satisfaction generated at one particular moment. This pattern is relevant to findings that servicescape can influence loyalty-related outcomes through customer satisfaction and behavioral responses in coffee shop settings (Gani et al., 2022). The qualitative evidence adds an interpretive dimension by explaining why customers may continue choosing a particular coffee shop because of the accumulated meaning attached to their experiences.

The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty became more nuanced when customers' repeated experiences were considered. Satisfaction can reflect an evaluation of a particular encounter, whereas loyalty in the present study represented a more enduring preference associated with accumulated experiences and personal relevance. A customer may therefore experience an imperfect individual encounter without immediately abandoning a coffee shop that has become meaningful through repeated use. Conversely, a satisfactory encounter at an alternative establishment may not be sufficient to replace an existing preference supported by familiarity and experiential attachment. Research examining customer satisfaction as a mediating factor in loyalty similarly emphasizes the importance of satisfaction within the loyalty formation process, while the current findings indicate that loyalty may incorporate experiential dimensions extending beyond satisfaction (Rambe & Khairani, 2025). The distinction reinforces the importance of examining loyalty as an ongoing relationship rather than as a direct consequence of satisfaction with an isolated transaction.

The interpretive structure of the findings suggests that sustained preference emerged when customers perceived continuity between brand meaning, servicescape experience, and personal

relevance. Repeated encounters with a coherent environment strengthened familiarity, while activities performed in the coffee shop created additional memories and associations that accumulated over time. The resulting preference was therefore distinctive because customers were not simply selecting the coffee shop based on functional attributes but were choosing an environment that had acquired significance within their routines. Table 5 summarizes this process by connecting the principal experiential conditions identified in the study with their interpretive contribution to customer loyalty.

Table 5. Interpretive Pathway to Customer Loyalty Beyond Satisfaction

Experiential Dimension	Customer Experience	Interpretive Contribution	Loyalty Implication
Brand Meaning	Customers attach personal meanings to the coffee shop	The brand becomes personally relevant	Strengthened identification with the coffee shop
Servicescape Experience	Customers repeatedly experience the physical and social environment	The coffee shop becomes a familiar lived setting	Increased comfort and experiential attachment
Brand–Servicescape Congruence	Brand meaning is perceived as consistent with the environment	Customers experience coherence and consistency	Stronger confidence in the coffee shop experience
Accumulated Experience	Customers develop memories and routines through repeated visits	The coffee shop becomes integrated into personal activities	Sustained preference
Customer Satisfaction	Customers evaluate individual service encounters	Satisfaction contributes to positive evaluations but does not independently explain loyalty	Supports, but does not fully determine, continued preference
Customer Loyalty	Customers continue choosing the coffee shop despite available alternatives	Preference becomes sustained through meaning, familiarity, and accumulated experience	Loyalty beyond satisfaction

The pathway presented in Table 5 demonstrates that customer loyalty was not interpreted as a single behavioral response but as the outcome of an accumulated experiential process. Brand meaning provided personal significance, servicescape provided the environment in which that meaning was experienced, and congruence connected the two dimensions through perceived consistency. Repeated experiences then transformed this coherence into familiarity and sustained preference, while satisfaction operated as one component within the broader relationship. This interpretation aligns with research showing that brand experience can influence brand attachment and loyalty, particularly when customers develop favorable relationships with the brand through repeated interactions (Hwang et al., 2021). It also complements research identifying brand equity as an important antecedent in coffee brand relationships, suggesting that accumulated perceptions and experiences can influence subsequent customer responses (Ren et al., 2023). The present findings consequently position loyalty as an experiential and interpretive construct that develops through the continuing interaction between customers, brand meaning, and the servicescape.

The findings have important implications for understanding customer loyalty in the coffee shop industry because they challenge an exclusively satisfaction-based interpretation of repeat patronage. Customers may remain loyal because the coffee shop has become associated with personally meaningful activities, familiar routines, coherent environmental cues, and accumulated experiences that competing establishments cannot immediately reproduce. This perspective is particularly relevant in an increasingly competitive coffee shop market, where consumers can compare numerous alternatives and may evaluate establishments according to product, atmosphere, service, price, and experiential characteristics (Wicaksono et al., 2026). Studies of coffee shop consumers also indicate that preferences and purchasing decisions are shaped by diverse considerations, reinforcing the importance of examining loyalty through a broader experiential lens (Muflikh et al., 2024). From a managerial perspective, the

findings suggest that improving satisfaction remains necessary but should be accompanied by efforts to create distinctive and coherent experiences that customers can integrate into their everyday activities. The central contribution of the study is therefore the interpretation of customer loyalty as sustained preference grounded in personal meaning, lived servicescape experience, perceived congruence, and accumulated familiarity rather than satisfaction alone.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that customer loyalty in the coffee shop industry is constructed through a complex experiential process that extends beyond satisfaction with individual consumption encounters. The findings demonstrate that customers develop loyalty when brand meaning becomes personally relevant and is reinforced through meaningful interactions with the coffee shop environment. Servicescape functions as a lived context in which customers engage in social, professional, educational, and leisure activities while developing familiarity with the coffee shop. Brand–servicescape congruence operates as an interpretive mechanism that connects customers’ perceptions of the brand with their actual experiences of the physical environment. Sustained preference emerges when these experiences become coherent, familiar, and personally meaningful through repeated interactions. Satisfaction remains an important component of customer evaluation, but it does not independently explain the persistence of customer preference and loyalty. The study therefore contributes to the coffee shop literature by conceptualizing customer loyalty as an accumulated relationship involving brand meaning, lived servicescape experience, perceived congruence, personal relevance, and sustained preference.

The findings also provide practical implications for coffee shop owners and managers seeking to strengthen customer loyalty in increasingly competitive markets. Managers should develop brand meanings that are relevant to customers’ activities, preferences, and everyday experiences rather than relying exclusively on functional product and service attributes. These meanings should be communicated consistently through the servicescape, including interior design, spatial layout, furniture, lighting, cleanliness, decoration, facilities, and ambience. The physical environment should accommodate diverse customer purposes, such as social interaction, working, studying, meetings, and leisure, because these activities contribute to the personal significance of the coffee shop experience. Managers should also monitor the consistency between brand communication and customers’ actual experiences because perceived inconsistency may weaken the coherence that supports sustained preference. Loyalty measurement should not rely solely on satisfaction indicators but should also consider familiarity, personal relevance, experiential attachment, repeated preference, and customers’ willingness to remain with the brand despite available alternatives. Creating a distinctive and coherent brand–servicescape experience can strengthen meaningful customer relationships and support customer loyalty beyond satisfaction.

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