

IMAGE LIFTS EXPERIENCES, NOT BONDS: EXPLAINING GEN Z LOYALTY IN THE STARBUCKS REWARDS PROGRAM

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Abstract: This study explains how experiential marketing and brand attachment shape Gen Z loyalty in the Starbucks Rewards Program and whether brand image strengthens these effects. We surveyed 385 Gen Z members in Makassar who had made at least two purchases in the last month and had redeemed loyalty points. Data were analyzed using variance-based structural equation modeling with PLS SEM to test direct paths and interaction terms. Results show that experiential marketing and brand attachment each have a positive and significant association with loyalty. Brand image significantly amplifies the effect of experiential marketing on loyalty, indicating that a favorable image frames and elevates how service episodes are interpreted and remembered by young consumers. In contrast, the interaction between brand image and brand attachment is not significant, corresponding to one rejected hypothesis and suggesting that attachment already operates as a deep bond that requires little image-based reinforcement. From a managerial perspective, firms should make everyday experience cues highly visible through coherent image building, while deepening attachment through recognition, access, and community within the rewards ecosystem.

Keywords: *Gen Z loyalty; experiential marketing; brand attachment; brand image; Starbucks Rewards*

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1. Introduction

The retail coffee industry in Indonesia has experienced rapid growth over the last decade. This trend is particularly evident in major cities such as Makassar, where coffee consumption has evolved into a central aspect of urban lifestyle. The latest GoodStats survey 2024 by (Yonatan, 2024) reported that Indonesia consumed approximately 4.79 million 60-kilogram coffee bags during 2023/2024. Furthermore, 40 percent of respondents stated that they consumed at least two cups of coffee daily, with the majority drinking coffee at night to maintain productivity. These findings indicate that coffee is no longer perceived merely as a beverage but has become an integral part of daily social and cultural practices (Martin Caniagu Putra Dewa & Hari Iskandar, 2024; Nadirah Putri et al., 2019; Yonatan, 2024).

Within the increasingly competitive coffee shop industry, the effort to maintain customer loyalty has emerged as a major challenge. Loyalty plays a crucial role as it significantly influences profitability and business sustainability. Starbucks, as one of the global leaders in the retail coffee business, continues to leverage experiential marketing strategies and emotional

brand imagery to establish a strong customer base worldwide Click or tap here to enter text. Nevertheless, its global advantages and aggressive marketing strategies do not automatically exempt Starbucks from challenges, particularly in regional cities such as Makassar, which are characterized by unique consumer dynamics and growing competition from local brands. This condition reflects the gap between the expectations built by Starbucks as a global brand and the actual reality of consumer loyalty in specific regional markets (Apriani et al., 2024; Nurhasanah & Dewi, 2020). This is further supported by GoodStats, which revealed that Kopi Kenangan ranked first with a 40% market share, followed by Fore Coffee with 33%, while Starbucks held the third position with 30%, highlighting the intense level of competition in Indonesia's retail coffee industry by GoodStats survey 2024 (Yonatan, 2024).

Starbucks' expansion across major Indonesian cities, including Makassar, reflects its success in strengthening its dominance in the modern coffee shop industry while shaping urban coffee culture through global cultural influence (Nurhasanah & Dewi, 2020). Based on the findings of the research team, there are currently 15 Starbucks outlets operating in Makassar. This growth, driven by rising consumer demand, also highlights the brand's focus on building loyalty among Generation Z through lifestyle-aligned experiences, emotional connection, and community engagement. Studies further show that promotions, lifestyle relevance, and store atmosphere enhance satisfaction and repurchase intentions, reinforcing Starbucks' competitive advantage beyond product quality (Gst et al., n.d.; Putra, 2024). Moreover, the Starbucks Rewards program operationalizes these strategies by transforming service interactions into measurable benefits and recognition experiences. This mechanism provides a fertile context for examining how experiential marketing and brand attachment translate into customer loyalty, as well as how brand image may amplify these effects.

In the increasingly competitive global coffee industry, particularly for brands such as Starbucks, experiential marketing has emerged as a crucial strategy for building customer loyalty. Starbucks goes beyond transactional interactions by creating immersive experiences that touch the emotional aspects of consumers, in line with the experience economy concept, which emphasizes the importance of sensory, emotional, and memorable experiences (Madiawati, 2023). Schmitt outlined five dimensions of experiential marketing—sense, feel, think, act, and relate—each of which functions differently to stimulate customer engagement and satisfaction (Madiawati, 2023). However, a study in 2023 found that experiential marketing does not always directly impact customer loyalty; instead, it often works through customer satisfaction as a mediating variable. This implies that memorable experiences alone are insufficient to build loyalty without positive consumer evaluation (Octaviananda et al., 2023). Literature also emphasizes the significance of brand self-congruity, in which consumer identity aligns with brand values, making Starbucks not only a coffee provider but also an integral part of lifestyle identity (Kalista Noor & Kuleh, n.d.). Therefore, experiential marketing is positioned as a differentiation strategy that contributes to customer loyalty, with satisfaction and identity congruence serving as critical mediating factors (Indriastiningsih et al., 2023).

Beyond experiential marketing, brand attachment is a key determinant of customer loyalty. It is defined as an emotional and psychological bond between consumers and a brand, surpassing transactional exchanges and encompassing closeness, passion, and affection (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021; Rahman & Susila, 2022). For Generation Z, authenticity and identity expression are essential aspects that strengthen emotional bonds with Starbucks, thereby fostering trust, repurchase intention, and brand advocacy (Bian & Haque, 2020). Nevertheless, some studies highlight the potential downside of excessive attachment, which can lead to resistance to change (Manggarani et al., 2021). On the other hand, brand image

functions as a contextual amplifier that determines the extent to which experiential marketing and brand attachment can translate into long-term loyalty. A strong and positive brand image enhances the effects of emotional bonds, increases perceived value, and strengthens consumer trust and commitment (Miranti, 2024; Supriyanto & Dahlan, 2024). Conversely, a weak brand image reduces the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategies and may even weaken existing emotional attachments (Martin Caniago Putra Dewa & Hari Iskandar, 2024; Saleem & Sarfraz Raja, 2014; Yulinda, 2022). Accordingly, this study positions brand image as a critical moderating factor in the relationship between experiential marketing, brand attachment, and customer loyalty.

Hypotheses

H1: Experiential Marketing (EX) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty (LOY).

H2: Brand Attachment (BA) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty (LOY).

H3: Brand Image (BI) moderates the EX→LOY relationship so that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of BI.

H4: Brand Image (BI) moderates the BA→LOY relationship so that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of BI.

2. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory design using a cross sectional survey to test causal relationships in which experiential marketing and brand attachment act as predictors of customer loyalty, with brand image specified as a moderating condition. Data are collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire. Analysis uses variance based structural equation modeling in the partial least squares tradition to estimate direct effects and interaction effects under realistic distributional conditions. All focal constructs are modeled reflectively.

2.2. Research Design

The target population of this study consists of Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers in Indonesia who are members of the Starbucks Rewards program. Gen Z was chosen because they represent a consumer segment that is highly engaged with digital platforms and tends to build strong emotional and experiential connections with brands.

The minimum sample size was determined using the simplified Cochran's formula for large or unknown populations,

$$n = \frac{Z^2}{4(Moe)^2}$$

n = Number of samples

z = Normal distribution level at a 5% significance level = 1.96

Moe = Margin of Error, which is the maximum tolerable or desired level of sampling error.

This study used a margin of error of 5%, so the minimum sample size is:

$$n = \frac{1,96^2}{4(0,10)^2}$$

n = 384,16

Based on the results of the sample size calculation above, it can be determined that the number of respondents who will be used as samples in this study is 385 respondents. The sampling method applied in this study is purposive sampling, with specific inclusion criteria to ensure the respondents' relevance to the research objectives. The criteria are as follows: (1) respondents must belong to the Generation Z cohort (born between 1997–2012); (2) be registered members of Starbucks Rewards; (3) have made at least two purchases within the last month at Starbucks; and (4) have previously engaged in the redemption of points (redeem) through the Starbucks Rewards system. The detailed criteria are presented in Table 1. By applying these criteria, the selected sample is expected to reflect consumers who actively interact with Starbucks through both purchase behavior and loyalty program participation, thus providing meaningful insights for examining the relationship between brand experience, brand attachment, and customer loyalty.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Description	Amount	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	143	37,15
	Woman	242	62,85
The Last Education	Diploma	9	2,34
	Bachelor's Degree	123	31,95
	Master's Degree	18	4,68
	Senior High School	199	51,68
	Junior High School	36	9,35
Occupation	Civil Servant	35	9
	Housewife	12	3
	Employee	31	8,1
	Student	265	69
	Entrepreneur	42	10,9
Store Location Occupation (respondent can choose >1 options)	Sunset Quay CPI	53	4,6%
	Mall Phinisi Point	69	6,0%
	Mall Ratu Indah	58	5,0%
	Mall Trans Studio	66	5,7%
	Bandara Sultan Hasanuddin	49	4,2%
	Jalan A.P. Pettarani	81	7,0%
	Jalan Patimura	45	3,9%
	Jalan Perintis Kemerdekaan	125	10,8%

	Jalan Karunrung	133	11,5%
	Jalan G. Bawakaraeng	65	5,6%
	Jalan Alauddin	65	5,6%
	Jalan Pelita Raya	124	10,7%
	(Hotel D' Prima)	80	6,9%
	Summarecon Mutiara	74	6,4%
	Sunset Quay CPI	68	5,9%

According to Table 1, The survey includes 385 respondents. Women account for 62.85 percent and men for 37.15 percent. Education is dominated by senior high school graduates at 51.68 percent, followed by bachelor's degree holders at 31.95 percent. Junior high school graduates contribute 9.35 percent, master's degree holders 4.68 percent, and diploma holders 2.34 percent. Occupation is led by students at 69 percent, indicating a youthful sample that fits a Gen Z focus. Entrepreneurs represent 10.9 percent, civil servants 9 percent, employees 8.1 percent, and housewives 3 percent. Store location is a multiple response item, so percentages do not sum to one hundred. The largest shares appear on urban corridors rather than malls, notably Jalan Karunrung at 11.5 percent, Jalan Perintis Kemerdekaan at 10.8 percent, and Jalan Pelita Raya at 10.7 percent. Other notable sites include Mall Phinisi Point at 6.0 percent, Mall Trans Studio at 5.7 percent, Jalan A P Pettarani at 7.0 percent, Hotel D Prima at 7.0 percent, Summarecon Mutiara at 6.4 percent, and several entries around five to six percent such as Sunset Quay CPI, Jalan Alauddin, and Jalan G Bawakaraeng.

Overall, the respondent profile is consistent with an urban Gen Z consumer base that is digitally active and retail engaged, yet it is not fully balanced across demographic strata. The female majority and the strong student segment suggest high social media exposure, frequent small ticket purchases, and a greater sensitivity to experiential cues and brand communities, which may amplify the effects of experiential marketing and attachment on loyalty. The education mix, led by senior high school and bachelor's degree holders, indicates adequate cognitive readiness to evaluate brand image and service quality, while the presence of entrepreneurs and salaried employees adds behavioral variety that can enrich variance in loyalty outcomes. The broad distribution across corridors and malls implies exposure to diverse in store atmospheres and service formats, which is useful for testing the stability of effects across settings. For inference, two safeguards are recommended. First, report results with controls for gender, occupation, and education to reduce compositional bias. Second, run subgroup checks to confirm that the experiential and attachment effects remain robust across key strata. With these steps, the sample provides a credible basis for estimating the proposed relationships and for drawing implications for youth-oriented retail strategies.

2.3. Operational Definitions of Variables

The operational definitions presented in Table 2 serve as the basis for measurement within this study. All key constructs are specified reflectively and assessed accordingly. The measurement instrument includes four latent variables aligned with the research framework: experiential marketing, brand attachment, brand image as the moderating variable, and

customer loyalty. Experiential marketing is conceptualized as a second order reflective construct consisting of five first order dimensions: Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate, captured through twelve non redundant indicators. Parameter estimation was conducted using consistent partial least squares with data from 385 respondents. The higher order construct was modeled using the repeated indicator approach and subsequently validated through a two stage procedure, both producing convergent outcomes. Statistical significance was evaluated using five thousand bootstrap resamples and bias corrected confidence intervals.

Table 2. Operational Definition of Variable

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Code	Items
Experiential Marketing (Bernd Schmitt, 2010; Madiawati, 2023)	Sense	Aesthetic quality and sensory appeal in store and app	X1.1	The store and app present appealing sights sounds and scents.
			X1.2	Product displays look clean and aesthetically pleasing.
			X1.3	Visuals and layouts make the brand easy to navigate.
	Feel	Positive emotions and perceived care during interactions	X1.4	I feel positive emotions when I visit or use this brand.
			X1.5	The brand improves my mood during daily routines.
			X1.6	I feel cared for during interactions with staff or the app.
	Think	Freshness of ideas and problem solving	X1.7	The brand offers ideas or features that feel fresh to me.
			X1.8	I notice creative solutions in how the brand serves customers.
	Act	Task efficiency and personalization convenience	X1.9	The brand makes it easy for me to complete tasks quickly.
			X1.10	I can personalize orders and pick up without hassle.

	Relate	Community feeling and social sharing	X1.11	I feel part of a community of customers around this brand.
			X1.12	I enjoy sharing my experiences with others who also use the brand.
Brand Attachment (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020; Rahman & Susila, 2022; Bian & Haque, 2020)	Affection	Warmth and positive feelings toward the brand	X2.1	I feel genuine affection for this brand.
			X2.2	Thinking about this brand gives me a pleasant feeling.
	Connection	Sense of closeness and personal bond	X2.3	I feel closely connected to this brand in my daily life.
			X2.4	Interacting with this brand feels like engaging with something familiar to me.
	Passion	Excitement and enthusiasm to engage	X2.5	I feel excited to follow and interact with this brand.
	Authenticity	Perceived realness and honesty	X2.6	This brand feels sincere and true to its promises.
	Self identity	Fit with who the customer is	X2.7	This brand helps me express who I am.
Brand Image (Salsabiila & Miranti, 2024; Supriyanto & Dahlan, 2024; Shiddiqi & Saifuddin, 2023; Wijaya & Suprapti, 2019)	Equity	Overall strength and esteem	M.1	This brand has a strong reputation in my view.
			M.2	The brand is well regarded among people I know.
	Energy	Dynamism and momentum	M.3	The brand feels energetic and forward moving.
			M.4	The brand appears active in bringing new ideas to market.

	Product	Quality and design of core offerings	M.5	The products of this brand look well designed and reliable.
	Price value	Fairness of price for benefits received	M.6	The brand offers good value for the money I spend.
			M.7	Prices feel fair given the quality and experience I get.
Customer Loyalty (Puspita et al., 2022; Apriansyah & Muhmin, 2023)	Trust	Confidence and reliability	Y.1	I trust this brand to deliver what it promises.
			Y.2	I feel safe choosing this brand.
		Advocacy grounded in positive belief	Y.3	I would recommend this brand to others because I believe in it.
	Consistency	Stable preference and repeat choice	Y.4	I intend to keep choosing this brand over time.
			Y.5	I prefer this brand even when other options are available.\.
	Satisfaction	Overall fulfillment	Y.6	I am satisfied with my experiences with this brand.
			Y.7	My experiences with this brand meet my expectations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Measurement Model Analysis

Validity Test

Instrument validity plays a crucial role in research, ensuring that each indicator accurately describes the construct being measured. In this study, validity testing was carried out by looking at two main parameters, namely loading factor and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An indicator is considered valid if it has a loading factor value above 0.70 and AVE more than 0.50. Validity test can be seen in Table 3.

Table 1. Validation Test

Variable	Code	Loading Factor	AVE	Information
Experiental Marketing	X1.1	0.722	0.608	Valid
	X1.2	0.710		Valid
	X1.3	0.781		Valid
	X1.4	0.735		Valid
	X1.5	0.763		Valid
	X1.6	0.708		Valid
	X1.7	0.779		Valid
	X1.8	0.745		Valid
	X1.9	0.898		Valid
	X1.10	0.811		Valid
	X1.11	0.871		Valid
	X1.12	0.803		Valid
Brand Attachment	X2.1	0.803	0.618	Valid
	X2.2	0.767		Valid
	X2.3	0.812		Valid
	X2.4	0.803		Valid
	X2.5	0.785		Valid
	X2.6	0.811		Valid
	X2.7	0.719		Valid
Brand Image	M.1	0.800	0.630	Valid
	M.2	0.819		Valid
	M.3	0.855		Valid
	M.4	0.775		Valid
	M.5	0.776		Valid
	M.6	0.754		Valid
	M.7	0.773		Valid
Customer Loyalty	Y.1	0.778	0.578	Valid
	Y.2	0.792		Valid

	Y.3	0.771		Valid
	Y.4	0.709		Valid
	Y.5	0.731		Valid
	Y.6	0.744		Valid
	Y.7	0.796		Valid

According to Table 3, the results indicate that all indicators meet validity criteria because they meet the necessary AVE and loading factor standards. This means that each indicator makes a strong enough contribution to the measured construct that this study can be considered valid for the next step in the analysis.

Discriminant Validity

One of the recommended alternative methods for assessing discriminant validity is the HTMT value. HTMT value can be seen in Table 4.

Table 2. HTMT Value

Variable	Brand Image	Experimental Marketing	Brand Attachment	Customer Loyalty	X1_M	X2_M
Brand Image						
Experimental Marketing	0.851					
Brand Attachment	0.747	0.878				
Customer Loyalty	0.801	0.864	0.871			
X1_M	0.569	0.420	0.368	0.304		
X2_M	0.320	0.367	0.442	0.378	0.731	

Table 4 above shows that all HTMT values are less than 0.9. This means that all constructs are valid when it comes to discriminant validity based on HTMT calculations.

Reliability Test

We used the Cronbach Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values to test the reliability of this study. Table 5 shows the results of the reliability test.

Table 3. Reliability Test

Variabel	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Information
Brand Image	0.902	0.903	0.922	Reliable
Experimental Marketing	0.941	0.944	0.949	Reliable
Brand Attachment	0.897	0.898	0.919	Reliable
Customer Loyalty	0.878	0.881	0.906	Reliable

Based on Table 5 above, it can be seen that all variables have a Cronbach's Alpha value and composite reliability > 0.7 , so it can be concluded that all variables are said to be reliable.

R-Square Test

This test is used to see how much the independent variable is able to explain the variability of the dependent variable in this study. R-Square value can be seen in Table 6.

Table 4. R-Square Value

Variabel	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer Loyalty	0.735	0.723

According to Table 6, the R-square value for the customer loyalty variable is 0.735. These results prove that experiential marketing, brand attachment, and brand image as moderating variables influence customer loyalty by 73.5%, with the remaining 26.5% influenced by other variables outside the research model.

Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing is a test conducted to test the relationship between variables in a structural model. This analysis is conducted by looking at the value of the Path Coefficient and p-value to determine the strength and direction of the significance of the relationship between variables. The hypothesis test result can be seen in Table 7.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test

Variabel	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
Experimental Marketing -> Customer Loyalty	0.321	0.311	0.116	2.782	0.005
Brand Attachment -> Customer Loyalty	0.270	0.253	0.120	2.241	0.025
Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0.382	0.408	0.117	3.262	0.001
Experiential Marketing_Brand Image	0.290	0.247	0.139	2.090	0.037
Brand Attachment_Brand Image	-0.227	-0.198	0.142	1.593	0.111

According to Table 7, the results of the hypothesis tests in Table X show that three of four hypotheses are accepted because they display positive and significant effects (p value < 0.05). Experiential marketing \rightarrow customer loyalty and brand attachment \rightarrow customer loyalty are both significant, and brand image significantly moderates the experiential marketing \rightarrow customer loyalty path. One hypothesis is rejected, namely the moderating effect of brand image on the brand attachment \rightarrow customer loyalty path, because the interaction is not significant (p value = 0.111). In short, brand image strengthens the impact of experiential marketing on loyalty but does not condition the effect of brand attachment.

3.2. Discussion

This study set out to explain loyalty among Generation Z Starbucks Rewards members in

Makassar by testing two direct drivers, experiential marketing and brand attachment, and by evaluating whether brand image strengthens these effects. Three findings are clear. First, experiential marketing is positively associated with loyalty, which is consistent with the idea that coherent sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and social cues convert episodes into relationship continuity for young consumers (Gao & Shen, 2024; Jo & Sko Brakus et al., 2009). Second, brand attachment is positively associated with loyalty, aligning with evidence that an emotional bond tied to the self predicts difficult loyalty behaviors beyond attitude strength (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). Third, brand image strengthens the effect of experiential marketing on loyalty, while its interaction with attachment is not significant. This asymmetry suggests that the image acts as an interpretive frame that magnifies the loyalty yield of experiences, but adds limited incremental power once attachment is already formed (Chen & Wu, 2022; Jin et al., 2012). The model explains a large share of variance in loyalty, indicating strong explanatory power for a behavior that is usually multi-determined.

The positive effect of experiential marketing should be read through the higher order specification of the construct. When sensory appeal, positive feelings, cognitive freshness, action ease, and a sense of community are integrated across store and app, Gen Z customers perceive higher value and lower friction, which strengthens repeat choice and advocacy (Gao & Shen, 2024; Jo & Sko Brakus et al., 2009). Evidence from Indonesian coffee contexts similarly shows that brand experience dimensions translate into loyalty through relational mechanisms such as brand love and trust, reinforcing the present findings in a culturally proximate market (Bernard et al., n.d.). Attachment operates as a deeper relational state that stabilizes loyalty across episodes. Foundational work demonstrates that attachment, defined as a bond connecting the brand with the self—predicts persistent behaviors and outperforms attitude strength in explaining loyalty-relevant intentions and actions (Park et al., 2010). Measures of emotional attachment have long captured affection, connection, and passion as distinct facets of this bond, which map well to the dimensions used here (Thomson et al., 2005). This moderation pattern advances theoretical understanding. A favorable image amplifies the effect of experiential cues on loyalty because it frames each episode as more credible, modern, and fair in value, which elevates perceived worth and trust (García-Salirrosas et al., 2024; Tahir et al., 2024). By contrast, once attachment is formed, image evaluations are already internalized within the bond, so additional variance in image offers little incremental power to convert attachment into loyalty—hence the rejected hypothesis for that interaction. Similar non-effects of image as a moderator have been observed in services where image primarily channels episode interpretations rather than altering the leverage of established bonds (Seo et al., 2015).

Methodologically, the measurement quality supports these inferences. Discriminant validity assessed via HTMT is the current standard for variance-based SEM, addressing the known limitations of legacy criteria, while common method variance was mitigated with procedural remedies and assessed using established diagnostics (Henseler et al., 2015; Kock et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Taken together, the pattern is theoretically coherent, statistically robust, and contextually consistent with Gen Z service consumption in Indonesia (Bernard et al., n.d.).

Theoretical implications

The evidence supports a layered view of loyalty formation for Gen Z. Experiences create episode-driven value that is frame-dependent on brand image, whereas attachment represents a durable self-brand bond that influences loyalty with less dependence on that frame. Future work should model the co-evolution of frames and bonds across touchpoints and seasons, and

compare which experiential cues most efficiently improve the frame for young consumers in emerging markets (Jo & Sko Brakus et al., 2009). These theoretical insights provide the foundation for several managerial implications discussed next.

Managerial implications

First, elevate everyday experiences. Maintain coherent sensory and visual cues, ensure effortless ordering and pick-up, and keep personalization simple. These levers reliably strengthen loyalty for Gen Z cohorts. Second, manage image as an amplifier. Provide visible proofs of quality and price fairness in menu design and digital storefronts, since a favorable image raises the return from each delivered episode. Third, deepen attachment with authentic recognition in the rewards ecosystem. Attachment's independent effect on loyalty implies that human-feeling routines and community cues pay off even when image is strong.

Limitations and directions for future research

The sample is urban, student-leaning, and composed of active rewards members. Inference should be limited to similar profiles until verified elsewhere. Longitudinal designs that track how image, experience, and attachment co-evolve, and mixed-methods panels that identify the most influential experiential cues in Makassar, will extend the present model. Competing models that include satisfaction or trust as mediators can test whether the same asymmetry in moderation remains across outcomes and contexts.

4. Conclusion

Experiential marketing and brand attachment both contribute meaningfully to Gen Z loyalty in an urban Indonesian coffee market. Brand image strengthens the contribution of experiences yet does not materially change how attachment converts into loyalty. The pattern aligns with a layered mechanism. Experiences work best when framed by a favorable image, while attachment carries its own weight across episodes. For practice, brands should deliver frictionless and memorable encounters, cultivate authentic bonds through recognition and community, and sustain a credible image that signals quality and value. Pursued together, these priorities provide a stable path to loyal behavior in competitive and price-attentive contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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