

What Are the Antecedents to Fast-Food Customer Loyalty?

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Abstract: Customer retention and loyalty are paramount in the restaurant industry, especially in the fast-food sector. Although customer loyalty in the fast-food industry has received extensive attention from practitioners and academics worldwide, researchers have yet to establish the critical factors of fast-food customer loyalty. This paper aims to reveal the antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty by synthesizing the results of recent studies. Methodologically, this research develops a systematic literature review following the PRISMA framework. Thirty-one publications available on Scopus and Web of Science databases were included in the review and analyzed to identify the most researched antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty in recent years. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for academics and practitioners interested in fast-food customer loyalty.

Keywords: Fast-food customer loyalty, fast-food industry, fast-food restaurant chains, customer loyalty, satisfaction, trust.

JEL Classification: M31, M10, O32, Q56.

1 Introduction

In recent years, companies have been drawing resources to increase customer retention and loyalty (Anantharaman et al., 2022; Dandis and Al Haj Eid, 2021; Dandis et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2020; Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022; Quoquab et al., 2020; Samsa, 2024) since consumers are becoming more demanding and tend to easily switch brands (Dandis et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Samsa, 2024; Šerić et al., 2020).

Customer retention and loyalty are paramount in the restaurant industry, especially in the fast-food sector (Ahmed et al., 2022; Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Dandis et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2023; Mobarak et al., 2024; Uddin, 2019). Since its establishment in the 1920s, the fast-food restaurant industry has been one of the most rapidly growing industries worldwide (Dandis et al., 2023; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022; Javed et al., 2021; Samsa, 2024; Singh et al., 2021; Uddin, 2019; Veas-González et al., 2024). As one of the critical contributors to the global economy, the industry is projected to reach an average market share of \$231.7 billion from 2020 to 2027 (Samsa, 2024).

Fostering loyalty has been one of the most challenging objectives for fast-food brands (Khan et al., 2020; Samsa, 2024) as customers typically visit 3.4 different fast-food chains and only 28% of satisfied consumers can be classified as highly loyal (Pleshko & Dawes, 2024). Thus, customer loyalty in the fast-food industry has been receiving extensive attention from practitioners and academics worldwide (Ahmed et al., 2022; Dandis et al., 2023; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Mobarak et al., 2024; Quoquab et al., 2020; Rajeh Hanaysha et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020; Šerić et al., 2020).

Despite the existence of a significant body of literature, researchers have yet to establish the critical factors or key antecedents/ determinants/components of fast-food customer loyalty (Anantharaman et al., 2022; Dandis and Al Haj Eid, 2021; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2020; So et al., 2025). Thus, this paper aims to reveal the antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty by synthesizing the results of recent studies.

The article will answer the following research questions:

- Q1: What are the most researched regions/countries in fast-food customer loyalty studies?
- Q2: What methodologies are most frequently employed in fast-food customer loyalty studies?
- Q3: What are the most researched antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty?

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Methodologically, this research systematically reviews papers published in the last five years (2020-2025) and available in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. To increase transparency, the PRISMA reporting guidelines are employed.

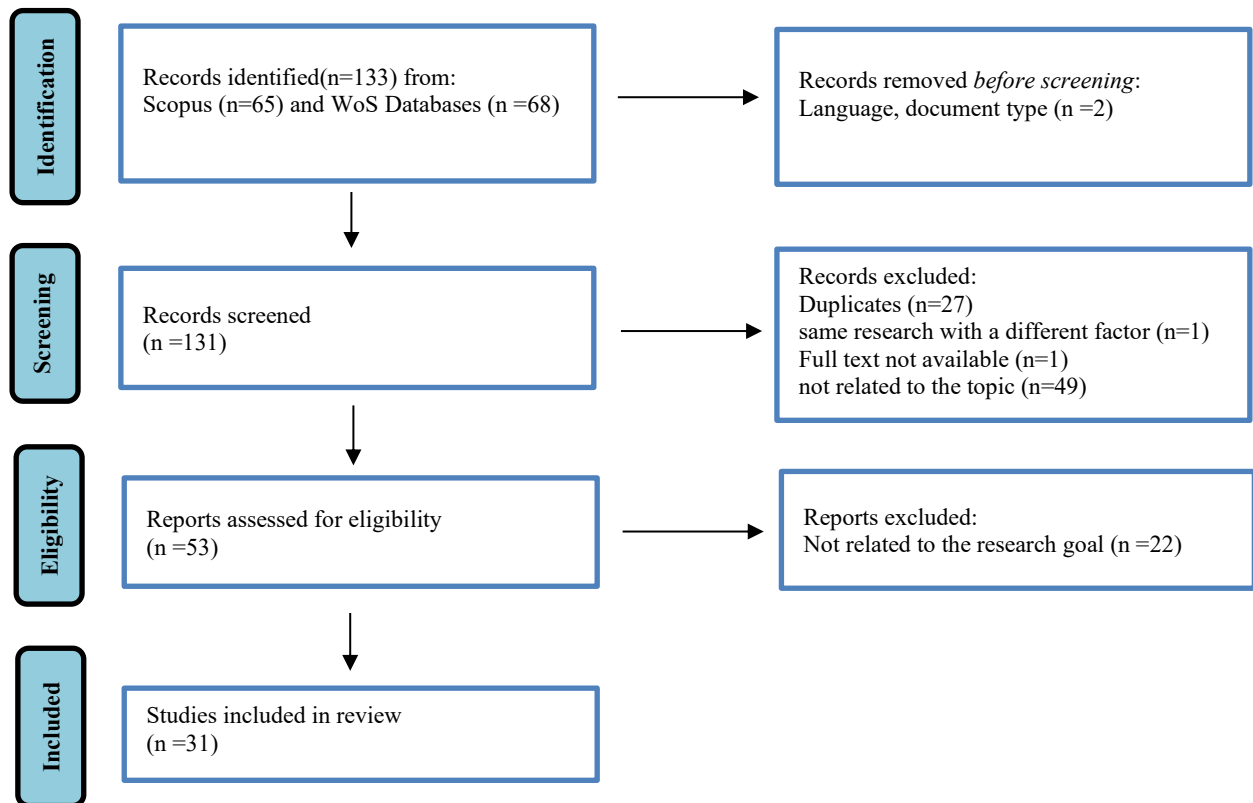
The article contributes to the theoretical literature on customer loyalty and the fast-food industry. It highlights the importance of various factors, including satisfaction, trust, image, and experience in fostering customer loyalty within the fast-food restaurant industry. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights to practitioners interested in increasing fast-food customer loyalty.

The paper is organized as follows. After the introduction section, the author presents the methods and the research results. Finally, the paper ends with conclusions.

2 Methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) was employed to achieve the research objective and address the research questions. The review followed the PRISMA framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Systematic literature reviewn PRISMA flow diagram



Source: Author's own

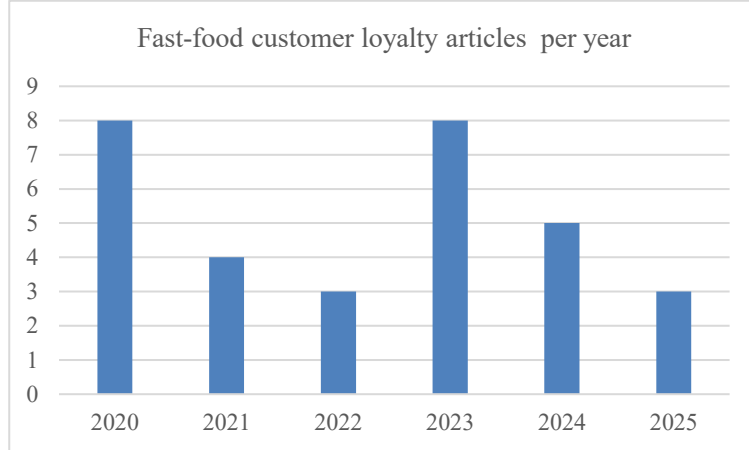
The Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) — Core Collection databases were used to identify the recent publications (from 2020 to 2025) for the systematic review. The article identification stage took place in August 2025. The keywords were the same for both databases: fast-food and loyalty. The search was limited to articles and proceedings in the English language. Due to the large number of documents, the titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened to determine whether the papers were related to the research topic, specifically whether they directly addressed customer loyalty (loyalty, customer loyalty, or brand loyalty) in the context of the fast-food industry. After that, 53 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Finally, 31 scientific articles were included in the systematic review.

3 Research results

3.1 The most researched regions/countries in fast-food customer loyalty studies

The analysis revealed that most articles were published in 2020 and 2023 (Figure 2). The number of publications in 2021, 2022, and 2024 was relatively low. As for 2025, three publication has been released, which can be attributed to the fact that the year is not yet over.

Figure 2 Articles connected to customer loyalty in the fast-food industry per year



Source: Author's own

Traditionally, the primary focus of previous research was mainly on the USA. However, since the fast-food restaurant industry has rapidly expanded worldwide, the number of publications from Europe, Asia, and emerging markets has also increased in recent years (Table 1). As noted in the table, the most researched region is Asia, particularly countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. As for Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Australia, and Oceania, the research is still scarce.

Table 1 Articles related to customer loyalty in the fast-food industry

Research Area	Country	Author(s)
<i>North America</i>	Mexico	Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022
	Guatemala	Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020*
<i>South America</i>	Brazil	Gasparetto et al., 2025
	Chile	Veas-González et al., 2024
<i>Europe</i>	Croatia	Šerić et al., 2020
	France	Watson et al., 2024
	Germany	Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020*
	North Macedonia	Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020
	Spain	Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020*; Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2023;
<i>Asia</i>	Bangladesh	Ahmed et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023;
	China	Li et al., 2025; Zhong & Moon, 2020;
	India	Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Syuhadah et al., 2023;
	Indonesia	Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020; Syah et al., 2022;

	Jordan	Dandis et al., 2023
	Malaysia	Hassan et al., 2023; Phang et al., 2021; Quoquab et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020;
	Pakistan	Azeem et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2021;
	Philippines	Lacap et al., 2023
	Kuwait	Pleshko & Dawes, 2024
	UAE	Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Rajeh Hanaysha et al., 2021;
<i>Africa</i>	Egypt	Alshreef et al., 2023; Mobarak et al., 2024;
<i>Australia and Oceania</i>	Fiji Island	Singh et al., 2021
<i>*Cross-country study</i>		

Source: Author's own

3.2 The most frequently employed methodologies

The researchers studying customer loyalty in the fast-food restaurant industry primarily employ a quantitative research approach (Table 2). 29 out of 31 articles are quantitative and use survey questionnaires to gather customer insight. Only two articles use the mixed-method approach. Gallarza-Granizo et al. (2020) combined a qualitative approach (two focus groups and one in-depth interview with an expert) with a quantitative approach (questionnaire) to investigate national differences and similarities between Spain, Germany, and Guatemala regarding customer perceptions of quick service restaurants. Mobarak et al. (2024) also used a mixed method (semi-structured interviews with the managers and a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire for customers) to study the impact of cause-related marketing on brand image and loyalty of international fast-food chains in Egypt.

Table 2 Frequently employed methods in fast-food customer loyalty studies

Research method	Articles	Author(s)
<i>Quantitative</i>	29	Ahmed et al., 2022; Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Alshreef et al., 2023; Azeem et al., 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Dandis et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2023; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022; Javed et al., 2021; Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Khan et al., 2020; Lacap et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2023; Phang et al., 2021; Pleshko & Dawes, 2024; Quoquab et al., 2020; Rajeh Hanaysha et al., 2021; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Singh et al. 2021; Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020; Syah et al., 2022; Syuhadah et al., 2023; Veas-González et al., 2024; Watson et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020; Šerić et al., 2020;
<i>Mixed</i>	2	Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Mobarak et al., 2024;

Source: Author's own

As for a result analysis (Table 3), common methods include a PLS-SEM (17 articles), SEM (9 articles), multiple regression (3 articles), correlation (1 article), and descriptive statistics (1 article).

Table 3 Frequently employed analytical methods in fast-food customer loyalty studies

Analytical method	Articles	Author(s)
<i>PLS-SEM</i>	17	Ahmed et al., 2022; Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Azeem et al., 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2020; Lacap et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2023; Phang et al., 2021; Quoquab et al., 2020; Rajeh Hanaysha et al., 2021; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020; Veas-González et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020; Šerić et al., 2020;
<i>SEM</i>	9	Alshreef et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Singh et al. 2021; Sugiarti et al., 2023; Syah et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2024;
<i>Multiple regression</i>	3	Dandis et al., 2023; Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Mobarak et al., 2024;
<i>Correlation</i>	1	Pleshko & Dawes, 2024;
<i>Descriptive statistics</i>	1	Syuhadah et al., 2023;

Source: Author's own

3.3 The most researched antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty

Researchers have been trying to identify antecedents/determinants/drivers/factors affecting loyalty in the fast-food industry context (Gasparetto et al., 2025; Ong et al., 2018). Several factors/variables/constructs, including satisfaction, trust, image, and experience have been researched in the literature (Table 4), however, there is no **generally accepted model**.

Table 4 The researched antecedents/determinants/drivers/factors affecting loyalty in the fast-food industry

Constructs/factors	Article count	Author(s)
<i>Satisfaction/Customer satisfaction/Food Satisfaction</i>	12	Ahmed et al., 2022; Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2021; Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2023; Pleshko & Dawes, 2024; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Syah et al., 2022; Syuhadah et al., 2023; Veas-González et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020;
<i>Trust/Brand trust/Customer trust/Social trust</i>	7	Azeem et al., 2020; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Javed et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021; Quoquab et al., 2020; Syah et al., 2022; Šerić et al., 2020;
<i>Image/Brand Image/ Green brand image</i>	6	Mobarak et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2021; Syah et al., 2022; Syuhadah et al., 2023; Veas-González et al., 2024; Watson et al., 2024;
<i>Experience/Brand Experience/ Customer experience</i>	4	Azeem et al., 2020; Dandis et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2023;
<i>Brand Awareness</i>	3	Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020;
<i>Perceived quality/ Perceived service quality</i>	3	Ahmed et al., 2022; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020;
<i>Brand Love</i>	3	Alshreef et al., 2023; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2020;
<i>Attitude/Brand Attitude</i>	2	Gasparetto et al., 2025; Lacap et al., 2023;
<i>Brand association</i>	2	Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020;
<i>Perceived value</i>	2	Lacap et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025;
<i>Relational benefits</i>	1	Dandis et al., 2023

<i>Importance of relationship</i>	1	Syuhadah et al., 2023
<i>Perceived reputation</i>	1	Quoquab et al., 2020
<i>Perceived price fairness</i>	1	Ahmed et al., 2022
<i>Perceived novelty</i>	1	Lacap et al., 2023
<i>Perceived enjoyment</i>	1	Lacap et al., 2023
<i>Perceived communication consistence</i>	1	Šerić et al., 2020
<i>Brand Attachment</i>	1	Li et al., 2025
<i>Cause-related marketing</i>	1	Mobarak et al., 2024
<i>Social media marketing</i>	1	Rajeh Hanaysha et al., 2021
<i>Marketing cues</i>	1	Hassan et al., 2023
<i>Happiness</i>	1	Zhong & Moon, 2020
<i>Subjective norm</i>	1	Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022
<i>Customer engagement</i>	1	Phang et al., 2021
<i>Corporate social responsibility</i>	1	Javed et al., 2021
<i>Positive word of mouth</i>	1	Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025

Source: Author's own

Some of the most cited factors in recent years have been:

Satisfaction is the most researched and cited factor in the fast-food customer loyalty studies. It can be defined as the customers' favourable emotions/contentment post consumption of any good/service (Ahmed et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023) or summary judgments/overall assessment of any good/service based on the experience with the purchase and/or consumption (Javed et al., 2021; Pleshko & Dawes, 2024; Syah et al., 2022; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Although satisfaction is subjective and influenced by different factors, generally, satisfied customers tend to repurchase and share positive WoM (Ahmed et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Pleshko & Dawes, 2024; Syah et al., 2022). Customer satisfaction has a significant positive influence on loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2022; Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2021; Pleshko & Dawes, 2024; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Syah et al., 2022; Veas-González et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020). It also mediates between customer loyalty and other variables, such as value (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020) and perceived service quality and price fairness (Ahmed et al., 2022). However, satisfaction may not necessarily translate into loyalty, e.g., Pleshko and Dawes (2024) argue that approximately 70% of fast-food brand consumers are satisfied, but only 28% of them can be classified as highly loyal.

Trust is integral to fostering loyalty according to commitment-trust and social-exchange theories (Azeem et al., 2020; Li et al., 2025). It serves as a close bond/connection between a company and a customer (Azeem et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2021; Kadavil & Usha, 2024) that can be developed through past experiences (Azeem et al., 2020; Gasparetto et al., 2025) when meeting or exceeding customers' expectations and being reliable and trustworthy (Singh et al., 2021). Besides experiences, customer satisfaction and restaurant image build customer trust (Quoquab et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021). According to research, trust not only positively affects customer loyalty (Azeem et al., 2020; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Javed et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Quoquab et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Syah et al., 2022; Šerić et al., 2020), but also mediates the relationship between loyalty and different variables, such as customer experience (Azeem et al., 2020) and halal logo (Quoquab et al., 2020).

Image influences customer perceptions, attitudes, dining decisions before visiting restaurants, and customer opinions, impressions, emotions, feelings, and experiences after the visit. Brand image can be defined as the set of cognitive and affective mental representations customers have towards a brand/company (Veas-González et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Creating a strong brand image is a critical marketing strategy for companies to attract new or potential customers (Singh et al., 2021), enhance customer trust (Quoquab et al., 2020; Veas-González et al., 2024), retention, and loyalty (Singh et al., 2021; Syuhadah et al., 2023; Mobarak et al., 2024; Watson et al., 2024). Brand image not only positively influences loyalty (Mobarak et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2021; Syah et al., 2022; Veas-González et al., 2024) but also mediates

a relationship between customer loyalty and cause-related marketing (Mobarak et al., 2024). Moreover, Watson et al. (2024) confirmed that the green brand image of mainstream fast-food brands positively influences customer loyalty and acts as a mediator between environmental concern and brand loyalty.

Experience is among the most researched loyalty antecedents as modern customers tend to favour experiential consumption (Khan et al., 2020). Customer/brand experience is a multidimensional concept involving sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions (Dandis et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2020). These feelings, emotions, impressions, perceptions, senses, and intellectual and behavioral responses accumulate at every stage of the consumption process (Azeem et al., 2020; Dandis et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2023). Fast-food dining experiences can be influenced by various factors, such as customers' age, food and service quality, internal and external ambiance, and marketing cues (Hassan et al., 2023). Positive experiences are crucial in cultivating loyalty (Azeem et al., 2020; Dandis et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2023).

Brand Awareness can be defined as a consumer's knowledge and ability to identify or recognize and recall a particular brand under various circumstances (Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020). It is one of the most critical components of brand equity and a factor affecting customers' trust and decision-making as they usually choose and gravitate towards the brands they are familiar/ had past experiences with (Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Sugiarti et al., 2023). Furthermore, brand awareness positively influences loyalty (Kadavil & Usha, 2024; Sugiarti et al., 2023; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020).

Service quality, perceived quality, or service quality are key concepts in hospitality, particularly the restaurant industry (Ahmed et al., 2022). Perceived quality can be defined as the consumer's evaluation/overall perception of superior product/service performances compared to alternatives (Ahmed et al., 2022; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020). It is highly subjective, as the quality of the same product/service may be perceived differently by each customer. According to research, quality (perceived quality, perceived service quality, or service quality) is closely connected to customer-centric outcomes, such as customer satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2022; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020), purchasing intentions (Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020), and loyalty (Saneva & Chortoseva, 2020; Susilowati & Novita Sari, 2020).

Brand love is believed to affect various customer-centric outcomes, including purchase intentions, WOM, and loyalty (Alshreef et al., 2023; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2020). It can be defined as the extent of a customer's emotional attachment to a particular brand (Alshreef et al., 2023; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2022). According to brand love theory, excellent brand love consists of intimacy, passion, and commitment components: Alshreef et al. (2023) confirmed the positive influence of only brand love intimacy and commitment on customer loyalty, whereas Khan et al. (2020) found that brand love passion positively influences brand loyalty. Moreover, Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2022) found that brand love mediates the relationship between subjective norms and behavioral loyalty.

4 Conclusions

Academics have endeavoured to establish the critical factors influencing fast-food customer loyalty in recent years (Anantharaman et al., 2022; Dandis and Al Haj Eid, 2021; Gasparetto et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2020; So et al., 2025). Due to a significant body of literature, this paper aimed to synthesize the results of recent studies and reveal the antecedents of fast-food customer loyalty. The systematic literature review showed that the most researched region in fast-food customer loyalty studies is Asia, particularly countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. Researchers studying customer loyalty in the fast-food restaurant industry primarily employ a quantitative research approach and analyse results using the PLS-SEM analytical method. Regarding the antecedents, some of the most frequently cited factors in recent years have been satisfaction, trust, image, experience, brand awareness, quality, and brand love, among others.

Although fast-food customer loyalty has received considerable attention from academics over the last five years, several areas still require further investigation. It is suggested that academics explore fast-food customer loyalty across different countries, including those in Europe, Africa, Australia, Oceania, and the Americas. Furthermore, they can study whether country-specific characteristics and differences in political, social, economic, and cultural factors have a distinct effect on loyalty antecedents. The influence of new or less researched factors, such as relational benefits, subjective norms, customer engagement, reputation, and marketing cues, could be further explored. Finally, conducting more qualitative or mixed studies could shed further light on customer loyalty from a psychological perspective.

The article contributes to the theoretical literature on customer loyalty and the fast-food industry. It highlights the importance of various factors, including satisfaction, trust, image, and experience in fostering customer loyalty within the fast-food restaurant industry. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights to practitioners interested in increasing fast-food

customer loyalty. Specifically, fast-food restaurant owners, operators, and managers are encouraged to pay more attention to their customer/ brand loyalty, as well as its antecedents. They should investigate whether customer loyalty is influenced by satisfaction, trust, image, and experience, and allocate their resources accordingly to foster loyalty.

The article, like any other study, has several limitations. Firstly, the literature review was based on current literature from the past five years, which may have overlooked earlier foundational research regarding customer loyalty in the context of the fast-food industry. Second, the review focused on publications available only on the Scopus and Web of Science databases, that might have excluded grey literature or regional studies available in other databases, such as Google Scholar. Finally, the choice of search keywords and refining search results, like limiting research results to only articles and conference proceedings in the English language, may have excluded critical perspectives on fast-food customer loyalty.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the Internal Grant Agency of FaME, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic for providing financial support under Grant no. IGA/FaME/2025/003.

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