How Could Brand Image, Ethnocentrism, and Brand Attachment Impact Consumer Behaviour in the Service Industry: A Comparative Study

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Abstract
Underpinned by self-congruity theory, cognitive appraisal theory, and attachment theory, the current research develops a comprehensive theoretical framework of the key factors determining continuous purchase intention for two coffee brands by incorporating critical factors such as brand image, ethnocentrism, and brand attachment. This paper also investigates the intervening role of brand attachment in such links. The study applied a quantitative approach by gathering data through a self-administered survey from 266 consumers who purchased two coffee brands in Oman: Starbucks Coffee (as an international brand) and Fifty Five Coffee (as a local brand). Using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), the empirical findings indicated that brand image significantly influenced brand attachment and continuance intention. Ethnocentrism impacted brand attachment and did not have a significant link with continuance intention for Starbucks. However, it significantly affects both brand attachment and customers' continuance intention for Fifty Five Coffee. Brand attachment positively affects continuance intention and significantly mediates the links between brand image, ethnocentrism, and continuance intention for Starbucks and Fifty Five Coffee. The current endeavour holds a variety of theoretical and practical implications for concerned scholars and professionals respectively. The limitations and future research avenues are also outlined.

1. Introduction

It is argued that an effective brand could attract both intellectual and emotional attention, giving consumers several access points to the brand while lowering competition vulnerability (Zambardino & Goodfellow, 2007). It has been suggested that behavioural brand engagement is a crucial success element in influencing purchasing decisions (Ballester et al., 2023). By matching their positioning to their target audience's values, aspirations, and lifestyle preferences, brands may help consumers develop their own sense of personal style (Lai et al., 2022). Consumers' engagement with the brand could lead to positive word of mouth and purchase intention (Ballester et al., 2023). Thus, companies are constantly searching

for new and innovative ways to build brand-clientele connections (Dwivedi et al., 2019). Such connections could enhance consumer loyalty and increase willingness to pay, leading to improving the business' financial performance (Li et al., 2019; Malär et al., 2011; Polat & Çetinsöz, 2021). Scholars have paid a lot of attention to brand image due to its significance in the current competitive marketing environment (Keong & Baharun, 2017).

Brand image is assessed based on what is offered and received when a service entity fulfils customers' expectations (Cheng et al., 2022). Consumers' engagement with the brand provides an advantage leading to continuance usage intention (Wu, 2022). Companies make continuous efforts to engage customers with brands using social media, user-generated content, interactive marketing, loyalty programmes, community building and artistic endorsers (Ballester et al., 2023; Ku, 2021).

Several studies have focused on how consumer behaviour could be influenced by brand image within different fields (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; He et al., 2016), including the tourism context (for example, Barreda et al., 2020). Recently, Alsharif, Salleh, Pilelienė, et al. (2023) found that consumer behaviour in hospitality has been examined from various perspectives including neuroscience, food tourism, and ecotourism, etc. However, relatively few attempts have been made to investigate the link between brand image and brand attachment, particularly within the context of coffee brands.

Given the growth in nationalism and the value placed on cultural and ethnic identity, consumer ethnocentrism has taken on significant importance for the future of the global economy (Kaynak & Kara, 2001). Ethnocentric consumers are consumers who prefer domestic over imported brands because of their belief that imported products hurt the domestic economy (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Sun et al., 2021).

This nascent research stream posits that a sizeable percentage of consumers are ethnocentric to their national brands (Suwandhi & Balqiah, 2018). Scholars also contend that ethnocentric consumers may have distorted perceptions of brand images and thus can distort the true influences of brand attachment on their purchase intentions (Saffu & Scott, 2009). Recently emerged research interests in ethnocentrism include the assessment of the connection between ethnocentrism and brand attachment (e.g., Gao & Yan, 2022) and the nexus between ethnocentrism and consumer behaviour (e.g., Akbarov, 2022; Han & Guo, 2018). Previous studies have not, however, investigated the effect of ethnocentrism on brand attachment and purchasing behaviour in the context of hospitality management, specifically in the beverage sector.

Further, both academics and practitioners have paid close attention to brand attachment as a crucial requirement for customer-brand connections, resulting in positive consumer behaviours (Japutra et al., 2014). Additionally, prior studies within different contexts have detailed the mediating role of attachment to a brand, along with various predictors and outcomes (e.g., Japutra et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2020; Madadi et al., 2022; Rasool et al., 2020), however, there is no known research exploring how brand attachment could mediate the influence of both brand-associated image and ethnocentrism on customers' continuance behaviour, especially in the service sector context. Consequently, the quest for a clearer understanding of the nature of the effects of brand attachment continues. This reflects the need to examine the impact of brand attachment on consumers' continuance intention in the coffee sector as well as how brand attachment could mediate the link between brand image, ethnocentrism, and continuance decisions.

Considering the preceding gaps, the present applied research seeks to (1) assess how brand image and ethnocentrism affect both brand attachment and continuance intention, (2) examine the structural linkage between brand attachment and continuance intention to buy the brand, and (3) evaluate the mediating impact of brand attachment in the connections between its image, consumers' ethnocentrism, and intentions to repurchase two coffee brands, namely Starbucks and Fifty Five.

Taken collectively, this study expands the body of knowledge on consumer behaviour in the services field (i.e., hospitality management) by developing a theoretical framework to assess how brand image, ethnocentrism, and brand attachment impact consumers' intention to repurchase Starbucks Coffee and Fifty Five Coffee. It also strengthens the existing literature by exploring how brand attachment could mediate the correlations between brand image, ethnocentrism, and continuance

behaviour. Additionally, it provides policymakers and managers of hospitality businesses with useful practical implications and insights into the main drivers of continuance intention for the purchase of coffee brands.

The rest of this work will be structured as follows. The second section demonstrates the theoretical background and hypotheses development, while the following section depicts the research methods. In section 4 we have presented the results, and, in section 5, we have provided a discussion of the findings. Section 6 illustrates conclusions, section 7 presents implications, and the last section provides limitations and further research avenues.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Underpinning theories

The present study is underpinned by three relevant theories: self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 2018), cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). First, according to self-congruity theory, an individual shows preference for brands which are congruent with his/her self-image (e.g., Rather & Hollebeek, 2019). Substantial congruence resulting in positive customer behaviour could occur when a brand image and a consumer's self-image coincide (Huaman-Ramirez, 2021; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Consequently, in this paper, brand attachment and continued purchase intent are two desirable consumer behaviours that could be related to ethnocentrism and brand image. Second, according to cognitive appraisal theory, an appraisal could be explained as a cognitive process identifying and assessing how people interact with their environment, leading to a certain outcome (Japutra et al., 2023).

It has long been hypothesised by researchers that attitudes may be derived from emotive and/or cognitive information. Peoples' feelings are referred to as affective information, whereas peoples' beliefs are referred to as cognitive information when it comes to attitude objects (Aquino et al., 2016). The mental processes people employ to gather, analyse, store, and retrieve information are referred to as cognitive processes. Perception, attention, memory, language, problem-solving, and decision-making are some of these processes (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Cognitive evaluation is an essential part of many psychological theories rather than existing as a stand-alone theory. The process through which people assess and make sense of their experiences, as well as what they mean and how they could affect their wellbeing, is called cognitive appraisal. The result of this assessment affects the way people feel and act. Therefore, individuals' perceptions of brand image and their ethnocentrism, in the current work, function as measuring factors that have an impact on the outcome (i.e., attachment to brands and continued intention to buy). Cognitive appraisal theory has been used by several academics to analyse the causes of consumption emotions as well as the connections between subsequent evaluations and a range of behavioural responses, such as repurchase intentions (Watson & Spence, 2007).

Further, according to attachment theory, people are compelled to create strong social relationships with brands, leading to positive consumer behaviour (Shimul, 2022). Although it has historically been used in reference to interpersonal relationships, scholars and marketers have investigated its applicability to the relationship between consumers and brands. It can be useful for brand managers to comprehend attachment theory. Companies may improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy by understanding the emotional requirements of their audiences and creating strong emotional bonds linking them with brands (Batra et al., 2012).

Given the preceding underpinning theories, we developed the following theoretical framework (Figure 1), by assuming that brand image has a significant connection with brand-linked attachment (H1) and continuance intention to purchase (H2). Similarly, we hypothesised that ethnocentrism has a significant connection with brand attachment (H3) and continuance purchase intention (H4). In H5, it is hypothesised that there is a link between brand attachment and continuance intention to purchase a brand. Additionally, it is assumed that brand attachment mediates the link between brand image

and continuance intention (H6) as well as the link between ethnocentrism and continuance intention (H7).

Figure 1. **The theoretical framework**
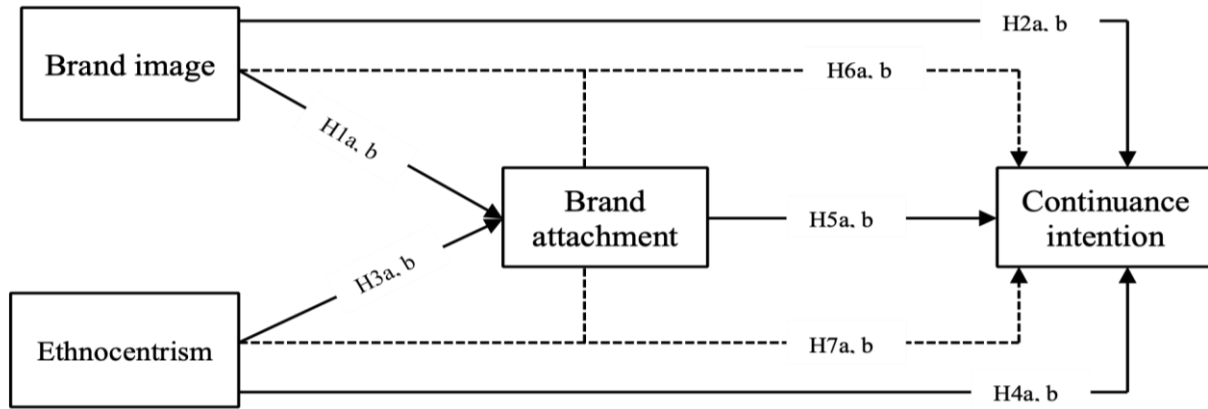
Source: Authors' elaboration

2.2 Brand image, brand attachment, and continuance intention

Brand image is comprised of characteristics that distinguish a brand name from competing brands and provide it with a distinct advantage (Webster & Keller, 2004). According to Zambardino and Goodfellow (2007), brands are intricate blends of functional, symbolic, and emotional values and advantages. Therefore, brand image describes how consumers generally perceive and feel about a specific product, brand, or place (Hassan et al., 2010). On the other hand, brand attachment can be defined as "the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self" (Park et al., 2008, p. 195). Prior studies have illustrated that brand image is a key driver of brand attachment. For instance, Vlachos et al. (2010) indicated that corporate image has a positive link with the emotional attachment of shoppers. He et al. (2016) illustrated that customers will demonstrate a greater emotional bond with a brand if they believe it to be socially responsible. In green packaging and service companies, Chen et al.'s (2017) research showed that positive brand preference perceptions have a beneficial impact on the development of brand attachment.

Keong and Baharun (2017) indicated that brand image is a crucial strategy that aids in bonding individuals to a brand and establishing enduring brand attachment connections. In addition, Dolbec and Chebat (2013) examined the impact of a positive brand experience on brand attachment when a store has a positive image. Moreover, Barreda et al. (2020) suggested that brand image positively affects emotional brand attachment of social media users in the travel context. Xu et al. (2021) examined the relationship between brand image and brand attachment mediated by brand trust. Diallo et al. (2021) divided brand image into hedonic, symbolic, and functional components to investigate the impact of hedonic brand image on brand attachments, finding positive effects on brand loyalty.

According to earlier literature in the tourism and marketing contexts, there are three typical approaches to customers' behavioural intentions or loyalty (Selmi et al., 2021): the behavioural approach (i.e., continuance purchase intention), attitudinal approach (i.e., intent to recommend and/or buy), and composite approach (i.e., a blend of both behavioural and attitudinal approaches) (Gam et al., 2023; Selmi et al., 2021). The behavioural approach is considered in the current work. According to Esmaeilpour and Abdolvand (2016), brands use product differentiation to improve customer loyalty. Japutra et al. (2014) identified that the reasons for the breakdown of relationships between company and consumer can be assigned to factors including opportunism on the part of the company and a misalignment of values between the two parties. This might help explain negative behaviours of consumers toward a brand such

as oppositional brand loyalty and anti-brand actions. Consequently, brand image is considered a key factor in shaping customer behaviour (Zhang, 2015).

In this sense, the connection between brand-associated image and the behaviour of consumers has been widely studied in different contexts. According to Keller (1993), a strong brand image fundamentally boosts brand selection, fosters customer loyalty, and lessens susceptibility to competitors' marketing tactics. It has been found that favourable store image significantly affects the loyalty of Koreans who shop at bargain retailers (Koo, 2003). Esch et al. (2006) reported that consumers' buying intentions are directly and positively impacted by the image of the brand. It is also revealed that brand image has a significant impact on purchasing intentions of UK consumers (Diamantopoulos et al., 2011). Thao and Tran (2023) empirically tested the relationship between brand image and continuance intention mediated by trust. Ngah et al. (2023) postulated that brand image positively influences the continuation of non-halal certified cosmetics usage. Zhao and Song (2022) also examined the impact of brand image on continuance intention in the context of online education, while Yağmur and Aksu (2020) investigated the impact of destination brand image (affective and cognitive) on continued intention to use. Based on this discussion, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Brand image positively affects brand attachment to (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

H2: Brand image positively affects the continuance intention of (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

2.3 Ethnocentrism, brand attachment, and continuance intention

Consumer ethnocentrism is considered to offer considerable potential in consumer behaviour research that is influenced by assessments of the country of origin (COO) of products/brands (Kipnis et al., 2012). Consumer ethnocentrism embodies consumer confidence regarding integrity and morality considerations when purchasing domestic goods (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Although the concept of ethnocentrism originated as a sociological concept, it has subsequently expanded beyond that field and been applied to consumer behaviour studies (Al Balushi & Krishnan, 2004). Consumer ethnocentric inclinations lead to conscious and deliberate favouritism towards locally produced goods and rejection of foreign goods due to emotional and ethical factors (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The COO of products, according to the ethnocentrism concept, has been demonstrated by Kipnis et al. (2012) to strongly influence consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards brands. In addition, the existing body of marketing literature has indicated the influence of ethnocentrism on how global brands are associated with concepts like brand prestige, brand quality, and the likelihood of making a purchase (Huaman-Ramirez et al., 2019).

By the same token, ethnocentrism functions as an effective predictor of consumer attitudes, convictions, and intentions to purchase or behaviours concerning imported goods (Al Balushi & Krishnan, 2004). Buyers with ethnocentric attitudes may become attached to and choose to buy local products despite their quality being significantly lower than that of goods from abroad (Siemieniako et al., 2011). In addition, consumer-related ethnocentrism could lead to unfavourable assessments of global brands, particularly when consumer ethnocentrism is high (Huaman-Ramirez et al., 2019). Similarly, Suwandhi and Balqiah (2018) concluded that high consumer ethnocentrism is demonstrated through support for local traditions and culture, a rejection of other cultures, and a strong brand affinity and positive brand image for local brands. Shimul (2022) suggested that ethnocentrism could act as a moderating factor in the connection between brand attachment and associated concepts. Amri and Prihandono (2019) found that consumer-associated ethnocentrism has a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions.

More specifically, Vuong and Giao (2020) indicated that stronger (or pro) ethnocentrism witnessed in Vietnamese consumers resulted in less likelihood of purchase intention regarding global brands. Early studies demonstrated that when local options are accessible alongside imported products,

consumers tend to favour domestic goods (Al Balushi & Krishnan, 2004). Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3: Ethnocentrism negatively affects brand attachment to (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

H4: Ethnocentrism negatively affects continuance purchase of (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

2.4 Brand attachment and continuance intention

Over the past two decades, brand attachment has been found to be a fundamental concept in the literature on consumer-brand relationships (Shimul, 2022). According to the marketing literature, brand attachment is a sustained emotional inclination towards and psychological connection with a specific brand (Gam et al., 2023). It is argued by researchers that brand attachment is a crucial requirement in the relationship between consumers and brands that results in favourable consumer outcomes such as positive attitudes and brand loyalty (Japutra et al., 2014).

The existing literature claims that higher levels of attachment to a brand affect customer behaviour in a positive way. Flight and Sacramento (2015) found a positive association between brand attachment and compulsive buying tendencies. According to Japutra et al. (2014), brand attachment has a positive impact on consumers' intention to recommend, buy, revisit, be resilient in the face of unfavourable information, and to protect the brand. In addition, Bahri-Ammari et al. (2016) indicated that brand attachment, which contributes to preserving the link with the brand in terms of repetitive purchase behaviour, provides a clear explanation for the behavioural loyalty of consumers. According to Kaufmann et al. (2016), customers who exhibit stronger brand attachment are more likely to buy the goods produced by the brand, whether they are original or counterfeit. Vahdat et al. (2020) indicated that consumers of Apple and Samsung smartphones have a more favourable attitude towards brand expansion when they have an emotional brand attachment. According to Gam et al. (2023), brand attachment has a favourable impact on the three aspects of brand loyalty, including positive word-of-mouth (WoM), intention to prolong a relationship with the company, and willingness to pay more for the brand. Shin and Park (2020) found that brand attachment has a positive impact on continuance intention mediated by brand awareness, brand meaning, and perceived value. Thus:

H5: Brand attachment positively affects the continuance intention of (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

2.5 The mediating role of brand attachment

Many academics and business professionals have examined the crucial role of brand attachment in developing long-lasting consumer relationships (Shimul, 2022). From the perspective of tourism and hospitality, marketers consider customers as partners and seek to build enduring relationships with them so that they will feel an attachment to the brand (Barreda et al., 2020). Malär et al. (2011) indicated that once consumers have a favourable image of a brand and an emotional connection to it, they attach specific personal connections to the goods and services associated with that brand. In addition, it is commonly acknowledged in the marketing literature that brands are created by combining rational and emotional components, and that feelings elicited by brands could improve buying and consumption processes (Zambardino & Goodfellow, 2007).

Given this discussion, this article postulates that both brand image and ethnocentrism are indirectly linked to consumers' continuance intention to purchase the two coffee brands. In this vein, according to Esch et al. (2006), brand image has a positive impact on consumers' attachment, which in turn improves their brand behaviours, such as remaining loyal to the brand and paying more for services or goods. Kessous et al. (2015) pointed out that consumers who have a close bond with a brand prefer buying that brand repeatedly. Additionally, Malär et al. (2011) reported that customers are more likely to

be emotionally attracted to a brand if it aligns with their actual or ideal self-concept. This might include their ethnocentrism. As a result:

H6: Brand attachment mediates the link between brand image and continuance intention of (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

H7: Brand attachment mediates the link between ethnocentrism and the continuance intention of (a) Starbucks Coffee and (b) Fifty Five Coffee

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample frame and data gathering

The present empirical work applied a quantitative method using a self-administered survey to gather primary data from consumers residing in Oman who have already purchased from two coffee brands. The research is based on the Starbucks coffee chain, as a global brand reference which, as of 2022, owned 35,711 stores in 80 countries (Starbucks, 2022). This brand was chosen because it is considered a global brand according to several studies (Cassia & Magno, 2022; Jeon, 2022; Polat & Çetinsöz, 2021; Ren et al., 2023). Founded in 2018, Fifty Five Coffee is the largest chain of local coffee shops in Oman. It claims to offer the finest coffee and provide an experience rivalling world class competitors like Starbucks.

Since determining the size of the population is challenging, two non-probability sampling techniques were executed. First, convenience sampling was used by distributing the survey link to potential participants through their social network profiles (e.g., WhatsApp). Second, snowball sampling was executed, and participants asked to disseminate the survey link to their soft contacts (such as family members and friends). Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method, involves recruiting new study volunteers from close contacts of current participants. When a population of interest is difficult to contact or when researchers are examining a particular population, this method assists in increasing sample size. The idea that the sample begins small and expands like a snowball as individuals refer others to the study is reflected in the name "snowball" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). These techniques were combined in earlier studies (e.g., Soliman et al., 2021) to guarantee a reduction in nonresponse bias while also assisting in collecting an adequate amount of responses.

The final version of the questionnaire is divided into four sections. First, the cover page contains the study's objectives and attests to the data's confidentiality and ethical compliance. Second, because this paper targeted individuals who had previously utilised both Starbucks and Fifty-Five Coffee, the online survey included a screening question about real purchases made in the previous 12 months. The third section encompasses questions about participants' socio-demographic information (e.g., gender, level of education, and age). The last section includes the indicators forming the investigated constructs. In this section, Starbucks' and Fifty Five Coffee's brand image, brand attachment, and continuance intention have each been assessed separately by the respondents.

Between July 5 and August 16, 2023, 448 participants completed the survey. Following a screening question about the purchase of the two brands over the previous 12 months, 266 responses were deemed to have met the criteria for further analysis. Of these 149 were males and 117 were females, with an average of 57% having an undergraduate degree and 30% having a postgraduate degree. The age distribution showed 72.5% were between 18 and 25 years, and 17.7% were between 26 and 35 years. According to the "10-times rule" which states that the required sample size should be 10 times the largest number of paths allotted to a given construct, it is evident that 266 responses is a statistically sufficient number for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2011). Additionally, we conducted G*Power using the more advanced and rigorous approaches, namely inverse square root and gamma-exponential (Kock, 2018), utilising WarpPLS 8 (Kock, 2022). According to Table 1, the minimal sample sizes generated for the two methods are 163 and 150 respectively for Starbucks and 248 and 235 for Fifty Five Coffee. These

outcomes further confirm that the responses collected were deemed adequate for producing reliable analysis and conclusions.

Table 1. **G*Power analysis**

	Starbucks Coffee		**Fifty Five Coffee**	
Methods	Inverse square root	Gamma-exponential	Inverse square root	Gamma-exponential
Minimum significant β in the model	0.195		0.158	
Significance level used	0.050		0.050	
Power level	0.800		0.800	
Minimum required sample size	**163**	**150**	**248**	**235**

Source: Authors' elaboration

3.2 Measures

The latent variables in the research model were measured reflectively by adapting pertinent measures from earlier studies (see Appendix 1). Four items, adapted from Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2011), were used to measure brand image. Ethnocentrism was measured using the reduced 10-item version of the CETSCALE (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). A seven-item scale adapted from Aureliano-Silva et al. (2018), was used for brand attachment measurement. Continuance intention was measured by three items adapted from Yang and Lin (2017).

3.3 Analysis techniques

The technique of PLS-SEM has been used for data analysis and hypotheses testing, based on WarpPLS 8 software (Kock, 2022). The fundamental arguments regarding applying PLS-SEM range widely. It is an efficient method used to support theoretically established hypotheses and evaluate a structural model that includes several variables and related scales. It is also a superior approach to assess complex models involving direct and indirect linkages such as mediation analysis (e.g., Hair et al., 2020; Manley et al., 2021). PLS-SEM has received a lot of interest from methodological and applied researchers across a variety of fields (Ilomo & Mwantimwa, 2023), including hospitality management (Khalifa et al., 2023). It additionally functions as a recognised technique for examining empirical studies of consumer behaviour (e.g., Mathew & Soliman, 2021; Soliman, 2021). The two phases that constitute PLS-SEM entail establishing both the outer/measurement model and the inner/structural model (Kock, 2022).

4. Research findings

4.1 Measurement model

The measurement model is established by evaluating indicator reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. First, Hair et al. (2020) recommended that all item loadings be greater than 0.7. As a result, all items with loadings lower than 0.7 have been eliminated. Hence, the analysis was re-run, and all item loadings are above the suggested cut-off limit of 0.7 (Table 2). In addition, composite reliability (CR) scores exceed the advised cut-off point of 0.7. These outcomes consequently

establish construct reliability. Also, the results (Table 2) show that the average variance extracted (AVE) values are above the suggested threshold of 0.5, establishing convergent validity (e.g., Hair et al., 2020; Kock, 2022; Manley et al., 2021).

Table 2. **Measurement model**

Construct/ items	Starbucks Coffee				Fifty Five Coffee			
	Loadings	*CR*	*AVE*	*VIF*	*Loading*	*CR*	*AVE*	*VIF*
Brand image (BI)		0.816	0.597	1.120		0.847	0.649	1.189
BI1	*NA*				*NA*			
BI2	(0.794)				(0.777)			
BI3	(0.768)				(0.811)			
BI4	(0.755)				(0.829)			
Ethnocentrism (ET)		0.922	0.597	1.124		0.922	0.597	1.205
ET1	*NA*				*NA*			
ET2	*NA*				*NA*			
ET3	(0.742)				(0.742)			
ET4	(0.797)				(0.797)			
ET5	(0.825)				(0.825)			
ET6	(0.823)				(0.823)			
ET7	(0.811)				(0.811)			
ET8	(0.686)				(0.686)			
ET9	(0.714)				(0.714)			
ET10	(0.768)				(0.768)			
Brand attachment (BA)		0.932	0.696	1.492		0.942	0.729	1.413
BA1	*NA*				*NA*			
BA2	(0.815)				(0.840)			
BA3	(0.839)				(0.806)			
BA4	(0.830)				(0.882)			
BA5	(0.848)				(0.875)			
BA6	(0.841)				(0.871)			
BA7	(0.832)				(0.847)			
Continuance intention (CI)		0.913	0.778	1.548		0.910	0.771	1.441
CI1	(0.891)				(0.868)			
CI2	(0.878)				(0.874)			
CI3	(0.877)				(0.893)			

Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; NA= removed item

Source: Authors' elaboration

For discriminant validity, two widely applied approaches were used. First, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) method which shows that the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its correlation with other latent variables, as provided in Table 3. The second approach employs the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015) which demonstrates that all ratios of the researched constructs are less than 0.85 (see Table 4). The outputs of the two techniques clearly confirm discriminant validity.

Table 3. **Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker (1981)**

Construct	Starbucks Coffee				Fifty Five Coffee			
	BI	ET	BA	CI	BI	ET	BA	CI
BI	(0.773)				(0.806)			
ET	0.119	(0.773)			0.089	(0.773)		
BA	0.207	0.310	(0.834)		0.270	0.382	(0.854)	
CI	0.324	0.266	0.547	(0.882)	0.380	0.304	0.465	(0.878)

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 4. **Discriminant validity: HTMT ratios**

Construct	Starbucks Coffee				Fifty Five Coffee			
	BI	ET	BA	CI	BI	ET	BA	CI
BI								
ET	0.241				0.163			
BA	0.268	0.344			0.330	0.419		
CI	0.431	0.310	0.620		0.482	0.349	0.524	

Source: Authors' elaboration

4.2 Structural model

The structural/inner model is assessed using a variety of metrics, including path coefficients (β), p-value, effect size (f2), and R2 (e.g., Hair et al., 2020; Kock, 2022). For Starbucks, it is revealed that brand image positively and significantly impacts both brand attachment (β= 0.195, p < 0.001) and continuance intention (β= 0.224, p < 0.001). Thus, H1a and H2a were accepted. In addition, it is indicated that ethnocentrism positively affects brand attachment (β= 0.322, p < 0.001) and has no significant link with continuance intention (β= 0.091, p = 0.066). Therefore, H3a and H4a were rejected. Moreover, brand attachment significantly affects continuance intention (β= 0.475, p < 0.001), supporting H5a. For Fifty Five Coffee, the findings indicated that brand image significantly and positively affects both brand attachment (β= 0.240, p < 0.001) and continuance intention (β= 0.279, p < .001). As a result, H1b and H2b were supported. It is also revealed that ethnocentrism has a positive influence on both brand attachment (β= 0.372, p < 0.001) and continuance intention (β= 0.158, p < 0.01). Thus, H3b and H4b

were accepted. Furthermore, continuance intention is positively and significantly impacted by brand attachment (β= 0.330, p < 0.001). Therefore, H5b is accepted.

Table 5. **Direct effects**

Hypotheses	Starbucks Coffee				Fifty Five Coffee			
	β	*p-value*	f^2	*Accepted*	β	*p-value*	f^2	*Accepted*
H1a, b: BI→ BA	0.195	< 0.001	0.045	Yes	0.240	< 0.001	0.066	Yes
H2a, b: BI → CI	0.224	< 0.001	0.074	Yes	0.279	< 0.001	0.107	Yes
H3a, b: ET → BA	0.322	<0.001	0.110	No	0.372	<0.001	0.148	Yes
H4a, b: ET → CI	0.091	0.066	0.025	No	0.158	<0.01	0.049	Yes
H5a, b: BA → CI	0.475	<0.001	0.261	Yes	0.330	<0.001	0.154	Yes
R² values:	*BA= 0.155 CI= 0.360*				*BA= 0.214 CI= 0.310*			

Source: Authors' elaboration

In addition, the values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for the effect size (f2) revealed that path coefficient effects are, respectively, low, medium, or high (Cohen, 1988). Consequently, it was found that all structural connections between the investigated constructs for both brands had medium to large effect sizes (refer to Table 5). Moreover, R2 values of the endogenous variables are presented in Table 5. For Starbucks Coffee, the results present R2 values of 0.155 for brand attachment and 0.360 for continuance intention. For Fifty Five Coffee, the results produce R2 thresholds of 0.214 for brand attachment and 0.310 for continuance intention. According to these outputs, the study model has satisfactory explanatory power (Cohen, 1988).

4.3 Mediation analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted to investigate how brand attachment may have an indirect effect on the connections between brand image and ethnocentrism (independent variables) and continuance intention (a dependent variable).

Table 6. **Mediation analysis**

		Starbucks Coffee			Fifty Five Coffee		
Hypothesis	**Path**	**Indirect effect β**	***p*-value**	**Outcome**	**Indirect effect β**	***p*-value**	**Outcome**
H6a, b	BI → BA→ CI	0.126	<0.01	Mediation/ accepted	0.129	<0.01	Mediation/ accepted
H7a, b	ET→ BA→ CI	0.188	<0.001	Mediation/ accepted	0.185	<0.001	Mediation/ accepted

Source: Authors' elaboration

In this context, the more effective, advanced, and less error-prone approach of Kock (2014) was applied, leveraging WarpPLS's automatic calculation of the indirect effects of β and associated p values.

Employing isolation, the indirect effect β (Table 6) between the brand image of Starbucks and continuance intention via brand attachment was significant (β = 0.126, p < 0.01), and between ethnocentrism and continuance intention via brand attachment was also significant (β = 0.188, p < 0.001). Thus, H6a and H7a were confirmed. Similarly, the findings indicated that brand attachment significantly mediates the connection between Fifty Five Coffee's brand image and continuance intention (β = 0.129, p < 0.01), and the link between ethnocentrism and continuance intention (β = 0.185, p < 0.001). Thus, H6b and H7b were accepted.

5. Discussion

The empirical results demonstrated that a strong brand image could lead to greater levels of brand attachment among customers of the two companies. This indicates that people will be more attached to a brand if they have a positive image and perception of it. This result is in line with earlier studies (e.g., Barreda et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2017; Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; He et al., 2016; Keong & Baharun, 2017; Vlachos et al., 2010) indicating that brand image is an essential driver of brand attachment among different settings. Furthermore, it has been found that brand image considerably and favourably influences consumers' ongoing intent to purchase the two brands. That is, consumers will consistently purchase a brand if they have a positive image of it in terms of its value for money, quality, reliability, and performance. This finding supports the results presented by prior research such as the work of Keller (1993), Koo (2003), Esch et al. (2006), and Diamantopoulos et al. (2011) demonstrating that brand image and consumer behaviour are positively correlated.

Surprisingly, the findings revealed that customers with higher levels of ethnocentrism had a favourable attachment to Starbucks Coffee. The empirical results also demonstrated that customers' ethnocentrism does not significantly influence their intention to continue purchasing Starbucks Coffee. This may suggest that Omani consumers associate symbolic local cues, such as local jobs and business prosperity, with foreign brands. As explained by Kipnis et al. (2012), foreign brands are no longer solely evaluated based on their 'foreignness;' rather, they can connect emotionally with consumers by incorporating symbolic local elements and, consequently, align with consumers' national identity.

Interestingly, similar findings were reported by earlier research on Starbucks in Malaysia and Taiwan (Isa et al., 2017; Su et al., 2006). Calling this phenomenon, a "western culture adoration," the researchers found that, compared to a well-known domestic brand, the influence of a well-known western brand on customer preferences was greater. Recently, Areiza-Padilla and Cervera-Taulet (2023) uncovered a similar effect for Starbucks in Colombia and Spain. They call it xenocentrism (XEN), an idea contrary to ethnocentrism which explains consumers' preference for foreign origin brands due to cultural admiration of another country above their own culture.

However, since the coffee market is still developing in Oman and attempts to establish a national brand are yet to be realised, international brands may be perceived positively by pro-ethnocentric consumers. As postulated by Kipnis et al. (2012), this positive perception may arise if consumers believe that the local economy and societal wellbeing benefit from the presence of international brands. Additionally, these results could be explained by respondents' lack of awareness about the country of origin of this global brand or by their strong brand attachment, despite having higher levels of localised ethnocentrism. In contrast, the findings suggest that customers' ethnocentrism has a positive and significant influence on both brand attachment and continuance intention to purchase Fifty Five Coffee. These rational findings demonstrate that consumers who have a strong feeling of ethnocentrism are more likely to develop a bond with and remain loyal to a local brand. The preceding results support past studies' findings (e.g., Abdelwahab et al., 2020; Al Balushi & Krishnan, 2004; Amri & Prihandono, 2019; Huaman-Ramirez et al., 2019; Shimul, 2022; Suwandhi & Balqiah, 2018) showing that consumers with greater ethnocentrism support local brands over those with a dual origin or those from abroad.

The results further demonstrated that brand attachment significantly influences consumers' intentions to continue buying both coffee brands. This suggests that customers with strong brand attachment are more likely to continue purchasing these brands in the future. These findings align with previous research conducted in various settings, including studies by Flight and Sacramento (2015), Japutra et al. (2014), Bahri-Ammari et al. (2016), Kaufmann et al. (2016), Vahdat et al. (2020), and Gam et al. (2023), all of which identified brand attachment as a key factor in consumer behaviour. Moreover, the mediation analysis revealed that, for both coffee brands, brand attachment significantly mediates the relationship between brand image and ethnocentrism (determinants) and continued purchase intention (an outcome). These findings underscore the importance of brand attachment as an intervening construct in the beverage context, mediating the direct connections between the variables. Additionally, as previously mentioned, no significant connection was found between ethnocentrism and consumers' continuance intention for Starbucks. Consequently, these outcomes emphasise the critical role that brand attachment plays in this relationship. These findings support earlier studies (e.g., Japutra et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2020; Madadi et al., 2022; Rasool et al., 2020) that have explored the mediating effect of brand attachment in different domains.

6. Implications

The present research effort offers a variety of theoretical and managerial implications. Firstly, this comparative study supports the underlying theories of self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 2018), cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), by developing and testing a theoretical framework of the factors influencing consumers' intention to continue purchasing two coffee brands in Oman: Starbucks Coffee (a global brand) and Fifty Five Coffee (a national brand). By illuminating the causal relationships between brand image, ethnocentrism, brand attachment, and continuance intention within the coffee business, this research expands the body of knowledge in services and hospitality management. Specifically, it is one of the first studies to examine how brand image and ethnocentrism affect consumer brand attachment and intention to continue buying coffee brands. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no published study has tested the consequences of these determinants on the continuous intention to purchase in the retail coffee business, particularly in the Middle East region, including Oman. Furthermore, no prior studies have contrasted the factors influencing customers' intentions to continue buying Starbucks versus Fifty Five. This study is also considered among the first to explore how attachment to a brand could mediate the direct associations between brand image and consumers' ethnocentrism (determinants) and continuance purchase intention (a dependent variable) in the beverage industry.

This study also offers numerous practical contributions for managers of hospitality businesses. The results underscore the crucial role that brand image plays in enhancing brand attachment among consumers and influencing their behaviour. By understanding the specific components of brand image that drive attachment and behaviour (e.g., perceived quality, service reliability, authenticity, and value for money) managers can tailor their branding strategies in an effective and more targeted manner. Managers of hospitality businesses are encouraged to prioritise maintaining a consistent and positive image of the company brand across all touchpoints to ensure that the brand fosters a strong connection that drives brand attachment. In addition, the marketing efforts of hospitality businesses should focus on how consumers perceive a brand, build that brand's image in their minds, and encourage actual brand purchases. This approach will boost sales and maximise market share (Zhang, 2015).

The results also demonstrate that ethnocentrism significantly affects consumer brand attachment and subsequent behaviours. This emphasises the value of incorporating local cultural characteristics and values into brand strategies for hospitality management. Managers can increase brand attachment by capitalising on the sense of pride and familiarity associated with national products and experiences. Similarly, managers can increase brand attachment for international brands by committing to local

society, through local brand integration. Moreover, understanding how ethnocentrism influences consumer behaviours (i.e., through repeat purchases) provides managers with actionable insights. In this context, it is critical for managers working in diverse cultural environments to recognise and comprehend the possibility of ethnocentrism. Additionally, stronger brand engagement and advocacy can result from the creation of tailored experiences that align with national preferences and traditions.

Furthermore, managers in the hospitality sector should be aware of the effects of ethnocentrism and use it to build strong relationships with their target market, thereby promoting business growth and success. The results highlight the value of conducting in-depth market research to identify and address potential ethnocentric tendencies, which can ultimately help managers improve brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and overall business success across a range of cultural contexts. Furthermore, recognising that brand attachment positively influences customer continuance intention to purchase the two coffee brands, managers should invest in strategies that strengthen brand-consumer relationships. This could include providing personalised experiences, exceptional service, and engagement programmes that emotionally connect with clients. These strong customer relationships provide hospitality businesses with an advantage in a market that is becoming increasingly competitive. Collectively, enhancing brand attachment can positively impact the business' profitability and brand equity in the hospitality domain (Chang et al., 2020).

7. Limitations and further research directions

This empirical study has some limitations that could be addressed by future research. This study was conducted in the coffee sector; however, other researchers could examine the model within different sectors in the tourism and hospitality industry (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and airlines). It would be interesting to see whether comparable results emerge with utilitarian products, given that this study was carried out on a multinational hedonic services company. Such research could provide valuable insights for concerned stakeholders. Additionally, future studies could empirically assess the research model in another country or undertake a cross-country study that includes countries with different cultural backgrounds. Analysing emerging markets from different continents could reveal whether the cultural characteristics of each region influence the results. This approach could make significant contributions and help address the issue of generalisability of the findings.

In addition, this empirical work used a quantitative approach and an online-based survey to gather primary data from consumers purchasing Starbucks and Fifty Five Coffee in Oman. Future research could apply a mixed-method or qualitative approach to unveil the key antecedents of consumer behaviour toward the two coffee brands, yielding practical insights and a deeper understanding of the research subject.

The study model includes three predictor variables (i.e., brand image, ethnocentrism, and brand attachment) of customer intent to continue purchasing. Therefore, future research could incorporate additional predictors (e.g., trust, corporate social responsibility, brand love, and local brand integration). In addition to ethnocentrism, future studies might also incorporate xenocentrism to better understand consumers' admiration of foreign brands, as there is currently limited literature on this variable. Moreover, ethnocentrism could be bifurcated into emotional and rational components to better understand consumer responses to it. Long-term environmental protection and providing comfortable working conditions for employees are key aspects of Starbucks' corporate social responsibility performance. Incorporating a green brand image variable along with environmental concern could reveal additional insights about consumer behaviour. Similarly, examining companies with varying degrees of global presence and positioning along the local-global continuum might offer a different perspective. Including metrics for perceived brand locality and globalness would help provide deeper insights into the main factors shaping consumer behaviour toward coffee brands.

An unparalleled and comprehensive understanding of how people react to marketing stimuli and make decisions about what to buy can be achieved through the application of neuroscience technologies to evaluate consumer behaviour. Because they interrogate the neurological and physiological processes that underlie consumer behaviour, neuroscientific methods might provide information that could otherwise be missed by traditional research methods. Recent studies have highlighted the use of neuroscience tools for assessing consumer behaviours and exploring branding issues (Alsharif, Salleh, Abdullah, et al., 2023; Alsharif, Salleh, Hashem, et al., 2023; Alsharif, Salleh, Khraiwish, et al., 2023; Alsharif, Salleh, & Pilelienė, 2023; Oliveira et al., 2022; Pilelienė et al., 2022; Rodríguez et al., 2023). Alsharif et al. (2022) and Alsharif, Salleh, Alrawad, et al. (2023) have also examined recent trends in advertising using neuromarketing tools.

Future studies could incorporate these tools to capture consumers' cognitive and affective responses more accurately. These tools would also necessitate using an experimental research design rather than surveys, allowing researchers to establish causation between variables rather than merely observing correlations. By manipulating variables in a controlled environment, researchers can develop deeper insights into why certain behaviours occur. The random assignment of subjects in experiments also improves the generalisability of the studies. This study used convenience sampling in cross-sectional research. Conducting a longitudinal study with stratified sampling across multiple regions within Oman would enable researchers to observe changes in consumer behaviour over time. Additionally, future research could examine the role of influencers on consumers' decision-making regarding the two brands (e.g., Gajanova et al., 2020).

8. Conclusion

Drawing on self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 2018), cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), this paper aimed to build a comprehensive structural model to highlight the key determinants of customers' continuance intentions towards two coffee brands, Starbucks and Fifty Five, operating in Oman. This was achieved by incorporating three factors - brand image, ethnocentrism, and brand attachment. The mediating role of brand attachment in these relationships was also examined. A quantitative method was employed, relying on primary data collected through an online survey from customers who purchased the two coffee brands in Oman - Starbucks, an international brand, and Fifty-Five, a local brand. Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the data. Of the 14 hypotheses tested in this study, 12 were supported. The empirical findings revealed that brand image significantly influenced brand attachment and continuance intention. Ethnocentrism influenced brand attachment but did not significantly correlate with future purchase intention for Starbucks; however, for Fifty-Five Coffee, it had a strong impact on both brand attachment and intention to repurchase. Brand attachment strongly moderates the relationships between brand image, ethnocentrism, and continuance intention for both Starbucks and Fifty-Five Coffee and favourably influences continuance intention. This research presents several theoretical contributions by expanding the existing literature on consumer behaviour in the service industry. It also provides several valuable insights for stakeholders and professionals regarding the variables influencing consumer behaviour in the coffee sector.

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