

# Customer-Centric Strategies, Brand Image, and Heritage Integration as Predictors of Customer Loyalty among Cafes in Bukidnon

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## ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty is becoming increasingly crucial in Bukidnon's booming café industry, which is molded by tourism, local businesses, and changing customer tastes. However, as the number of cafés continues to grow, businesses must go beyond simply offering quality products. Building strong customer relationships, maintaining a positive brand image, and integrating local cultural heritage to create loyal customers remains a challenge. This study is conceptualized to examine the customer-centric initiatives, brand image strategies, and heritage integration as determinants of customer loyalty in Bukidnon cafés. A quantitative, descriptive–correlational research design was employed. Data were collected from 237 café customers using a structured questionnaire validated through factor analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the concepts used in this study, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine the influence of customer-centric strategies, brand image, and heritage integration on customer loyalty. The findings showed customers rated highly the cafes' customer-centric strategies, branding image and heritage integration. Moreover, customer loyalty was also high. Customer-centric strategies and heritage integration significantly influence customer loyalty, and customer-centric strategies emerged as the strongest and most significant influence. However, when taken to isolation from the other variable, brand image is not statistically significant. It is concluded that while brand image is important for initial attraction, it appears to play a secondary role in sustaining loyalty. Customer loyalty develops through genuine experiences where customers feel acknowledged, valued, and connected to something meaningful. It is recommended that café owners may integrate business strategies that develops strong customer relationships and incorporating local cultural elements to increase customer loyalty.

**Keywords:** customer-centric strategies, brand image, heritage integration, customer loyalty.

## INTRODUCTION

Evaluating the drivers of customer loyalty has become increasingly vital in the café industry, particularly in emerging and culturally rich regions such as Bukidnon. As the local café scene continues to grow, fueled by tourism, entrepreneurship, and evolving consumer preferences, there is a need for research that explores how customer-centric strategies, brand image, and heritage integration contribute to loyalty formation. Customer-centric strategies, a key to enhancing experiences and building loyalty. A strong brand helps cafés stand out in a competitive market, while incorporating local cultural heritage adds authenticity and deepens customer connection. While several studies have explored loyalty in urban settings or across national chains, there remains a gap in localized research that examines these constructs within the unique socio-economic and cultural landscape of Mindanao. This study seeks to address that gap by offering empirical evidence specific to cafés in Bukidnon. This study supports the SDGs of the United Nations. The objectives of decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, and responsible consumption and production. Goal 11 to make cities and settlements safe, resilient, and sustainable.

## LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Building and sustaining customer loyalty has become a critical focus for cafés, especially in regions like Bukidnon where tourism, local entrepreneurship, and evolving consumer preferences shape the market. While offering quality products is important, long-term customer loyalty depends on how well cafés implement strategies that prioritize customer needs, maintain a strong brand image, and integrate local heritage into the customer experience. Studies suggest that personalized service, meaningful customer interactions, and innovative offerings significantly enhance customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.

This study is anchored on Relationship Marketing Theory CRMT, and Brand Equity Theory. Relationship Marketing Theory emphasizes that trust, responsiveness, and personalized engagement strengthen emotional bonds and foster long-term loyalty. In cafés, this translates into practices such as attentive service, remembering customer

preferences, and offering innovative products tailored to patrons’ needs. Brand Equity Theory highlights that a strong and positive brand image enhances customer perception, preference, and willingness to return, while integrating local culture and heritage into business operations strengthens authenticity, emotional connection, and customer engagement. Guided by these theories, this study examines customer-centric strategies, brand image, and heritage integration as predictors of customer loyalty. Customer-centric strategies focus on service personalization, relationship-building, and innovation; brand image emphasizes trust, quality, and memorability; and heritage integration highlights the use of local culture in café branding, ambiance, and offerings. Customer loyalty is measured in terms of preference, repeat patronage, emotional attachment, and long-term commitment to the cafés. This framework establishes the theoretical foundation linking service practices, brand perception, and cultural integration to sustained customer loyalty in the café industry of Bukidnon.

### Research Questions

This study seeks to determine if customer-centric strategies, brand image, and cultural heritage integration influence customer loyalty in selected cafés in Bukidnon.

Specifically, it will seek to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are customer-centric strategies being implemented in Bukidnon cafés in terms of:
  - 1.1 Customer orientation;
  - 1.2 Customer relationship orientation; and
  - 1.3 Innovativeness?
2. What is the customers assessment of the brand image of cafes in Bukidnon?
3. To what extent do cafés in Bukidnon integrate local heritage into their business operations?
4. What is the level of customer loyalty among café patrons in Bukidnon?
5. Do the participants’ assessment of the customer-centric strategies, brand image and heritage integration significantly influence their loyalty?

The following figure shows the schematic diagram of the concepts in this study

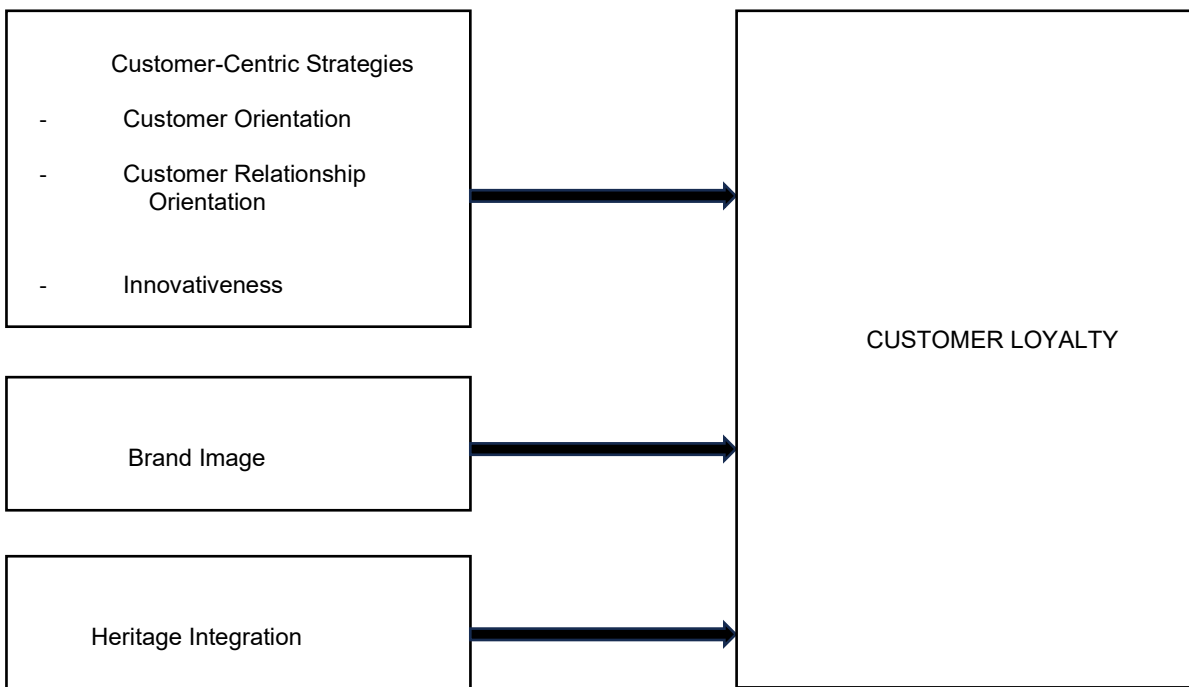


Figure 1. Schematic Presentation of the Study

### METHODOLOGY

This study determined the influence of customer-centric strategies, brand image, heritage integration to customer loyalty of selected cafes in Bukidnon. Two hundred thirty-seven (237) customers participated in this study. Data were collected using a factor analyzed structured survey questionnaire. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert agreement scale. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation

were employed to summarize and interpret the participants' assessment on customer-centric strategies, brand image, heritage integration and their loyalty. Multiple linear regression analysis was utilized to determine whether any independent variables customer-centric strategies, brand image, heritage integration predict customer loyalty.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Assessment of Customer-Centric Strategies in Terms of Customer Orientation, Customer Relationship Orientation, And Innovativeness

Table 1 presents the summary of the mean, standard deviation, and interpretation of the participants' assessment on Customer-Centric Strategies in Terms of Customer Orientation, Customer Relationship Orientation, and Innovativeness.

**Table 1** Summary of Mean and Interpretation of Customer-Centric Strategies

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Customer Orientation	4.55	.615	Very high
Customer Relationship Orientation	4.25	.820	High
Innovativeness	4.39	.693	High

The results show that cafés in Bukidnon practice strong customer-centric strategies across the key dimensions of customer orientation, customer relationship orientation, and innovativeness. The highest mean score (4.55) was observed in customer orientation, interpreted as very high. The standard deviation of 0.615 suggests relatively low variability in responses, indicating that cafés strongly prioritize understanding customer needs and providing personalized services. Innovativeness also received a high-level mean score (4.39), The standard deviation of 0.693 reflects relatively minimal dispersion in responses, suggesting that cafés actively introduce new ideas, products, and service improvements to enhance customer experiences. Meanwhile, customer relationship orientation obtains a mean of 4.25, the findings indicate that customer relationship orientation is perceived at a high level. The standard deviation of 0.820 suggests moderate variability in responses, reflecting the cafés' efforts to maintain communication, recognize customers, and build meaningful relationships with their patrons.

These findings suggest that cafés are consistently applying customer-focused practices that strengthen their connection with customers. By paying attention to customer preferences, encouraging positive interactions, and continuously improving their products and services, cafés are able to create more satisfying and memorable experiences. Such practices help build trust and engagement, which encourage customers to return and continue supporting the café (Sayil et al., 2016; Hult et al., 2022). Overall, the findings highlight that customer orientation, relationship-building, and innovativeness are important strengths of the cafés' customer-centric strategies, contributing to enhanced customer satisfaction and long-term customer loyalty.

### Assessment of Organization's Brand Image.

**Table 2** Summary of Mean and Interpretation of Organization's Brand Image

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Brand Image	4.73	.501	Very high

The results demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of respondents expressed very high perceptions of the organization's brand image with an overall mean of 4.73. The standard deviation of 0.501 suggests very low variability in responses, the findings indicate that the organization's brand image is a significant strength of the café. The consistently very high mean scores across all indicators highlight strong brand recognition, trust, perceived quality, and value alignment. These elements collectively reinforce customer confidence, promote positive word-of-mouth, and support sustained customer loyalty and competitive advantage. This supports the view that in service-oriented and culturally rich contexts, such as cafés in Bukidnon, brand image works synergistically with customer-centric and heritage strategies to create a holistic experience that nurtures enduring loyalty (Rastogi, 2024; Syafikah, 2024).

### Assessment of Local Heritage Integration

**Table 3 Summary of Mean and Interpretation of Local Heritage Integration**

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Heritage Integration	4.71	.477	Very high

The results indicate that local heritage integration is a significant strength of the café’s customer-centric strategies. With an overall mean of 4.71, the findings show that local heritage integration is perceived at a very high level. The standard deviation of 0.477 reflects minimal variation in responses, suggesting a consistent and widely shared perception among participants regarding the café’s efforts to embed cultural elements. These results are consistent with prior research emphasizing that heritage integration in hospitality enhances authenticity, emotional connection, and customer loyalty (Wiedmann et al., 2018; Batat, 2020). The consistently very high mean scores across all indicators highlight the café’s commitment to promoting regional culture through food, ambiance, branding, and staff interaction. These practices not only enrich customer experiences but also foster cultural appreciation, strengthen emotional attachment, enhance brand distinctiveness, and support long-term customer loyalty.

### Assessment of the Level of Customer Loyalty.

**Table 4 Summary of Mean and Interpretation the Level of Customer Loyalty**

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Customer Loyalty	4.39	.679	High

The result showed that majority of respondents expressed highly favorable perceptions regarding their level of customer loyalty toward cafés in Bukidnon. With an overall mean of 4.39, the findings indicate that customer loyalty is perceived at a high level. The standard deviation of 0.679 suggests moderate consistency in responses, reflecting generally shared positive experiences, though with some variability among participants’ loyalty behaviors. These results align with prior research indicating that loyalty in hospitality contexts is influenced by both emotional attachment and satisfaction derived from consistent, quality experiences (Kim et al., 2021; Napoli et al., 2017).

Overall, the findings indicate that customer loyalty is a clear strength among cafés in Bukidnon, particularly those included in the study

### The Influence of Customer-Centric Strategies, Brand Image and Heritage Integration to Customer Loyalty.

**Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis on the influence of the customer-centric strategies, brand image and heritage integration to customer loyalty.**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.838	.375		2.233	.026
<b>Customer-Centric Strategies</b>	.486	.083	.436	5.887	.000
<b>Brand Image</b>	.072	.111	.053	.652	.515
<b>Heritage integration</b>	.228	.115	.160	1.984	.048
<b>Model Summary</b>					
R = .593      R <sup>2</sup> = .351      Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .343      F = 42.09      P = <.001					

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that the model predicting customer loyalty from customer-centric strategies, brand image, and heritage integration is statistically significant. The regression model yielded an

$F$ -value of 42.09 with a  $p$ -value of  $< .001$ , confirming that the set of predictors collectively exerts a significant influence on customer loyalty. The strength of the relationship between the independent variables and customer loyalty is good ( $R = .593$ ), and the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in customer loyalty ( $R^2 = .351$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .343$ ). This indicates that approximately 35.1% of the variability in customer loyalty can be attributed to differences in customer-centric strategies, brand image, and heritage integration, suggesting that these factors play a meaningful role in shaping customers' loyalty toward the selected cafés in Bukidnon. Since the model is combining the independent variables has a significant influence on the dependent variable, the null hypothesis stating that these factors do not significantly influence customer loyalty (HO 1), therefore is *rejected*.

In individual predictors, customer-centric strategies emerged as the strongest and most significant determinant of customer loyalty ( $B = .486$ ,  $t = 5.887$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in customer-centric strategies, customer loyalty increases by 0.486 units. The results highlight that practices such as personalization, responsiveness to customer needs, and relationship-oriented service play a central role in cultivating loyal customers. Thus, the hypothesis stating customer-centric strategies do not significantly influence customer loyalty (HO 2) is rejected. Many scholars confirm the findings of this study indicating the importance of placing customers at the core of business operations is crucial to build lasting loyalty (Huang, Wang, & Lin, 2022; Tahir, Adnan, & Saeed, 2024).

Meanwhile, heritage integration also demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect on customer loyalty ( $B = .228$ ,  $t = 1.984$ ,  $p = .048$ ). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in heritage integration, customer loyalty rises, suggesting that embedding elements of cultural identity, tradition, and local heritage into customer experience contributes to higher loyalty. Although the effect is not as strong as customer-centric strategies, the significance of heritage integration highlights that customers value authenticity, cultural connection, and a sense of belonging, which strengthens emotional attachment and deepens loyalty. Therefore, the hypothesis stating heritage integration do not significantly influence customer loyalty (HO 4) is *rejected*.

However, brand image was found to have a positive but statistically non-significant effect on customer loyalty ( $B = .072$ ,  $\beta = .053$ ,  $t = .652$ ,  $p = .515$ ). While a favorable brand image can contribute to customers' overall perceptions, the results suggest that, when considered alongside customer-centric strategies and heritage integration, brand image alone does not significantly predict loyalty. This implies that positive brand perceptions may be insufficient to secure repeat patronage unless reinforced by meaningful experiences, relational engagement, and cultural connections. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that brand image does not influence customer loyalty (HO 3) cannot be rejected.

Overall, the findings indicate that customer loyalty among café patrons in Bukidnon is strongly influenced by a combination of relational and experiential factors. Customer-centric strategies serve as the primary driver of loyalty, reinforcing the importance of placing customers at the core of café operations. Heritage integration provides an additional meaningful contribution by strengthening emotional and cultural bonds, while brand image, although highly valued, plays a secondary role when not supported by strong service relationships.

This aligns with prior research demonstrating that loyalty is not solely a function of brand perception but emerges from the holistic interplay of service personalization, relational engagement, and culturally meaningful experiences (Kim et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2020). In experiential settings such as cafés, where human interaction, ambiance, and cultural identity intersect, organizations that integrate customer-centric approaches with heritage-driven experiences create a competitive advantage by fostering deep emotional connections, trust, and long-term patronage (Batat, 2020; Balmer, 2021). As such, the study underscores that customer loyalty is most effectively cultivated when businesses combine strategic relational practices with authentic and culturally resonant experiences, transforming ordinary transactions into memorable, loyalty-building encounters.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that customer loyalty in cafés is strongly influenced by a combination of relational, experiential, and cultural factors. Customer-centric strategies emerged as the most significant determinant of loyalty, highlighting the critical role of attentive service, personalized experiences, proactive engagement, and innovative practices in fostering strong customer relationships. Heritage integration also positively contributes to loyalty by creating emotional connections, promoting cultural authenticity, and enhancing the overall customer experience. While brand image was perceived very positively, it plays a supportive role, reinforcing loyalty when paired with effective customer-centric practices and meaningful heritage incorporation.

Overall, the study demonstrates that cafés that prioritize understanding and responding to customer needs, while strategically embedding local cultural elements in their offerings and environment, can cultivate deeper emotional bonds, encourage repeat patronage, and establish long-term competitive advantage. The results affirm that loyalty

is not solely a function of brand reputation but is best achieved through an integrated approach that combines service excellence, cultural relevance, and customer engagement.

In essence, to strengthen customer loyalty, cafés should maintain a strong focus on responsive, innovative, and personalized service practices while celebrating and incorporating local heritage in their brand identity and operations. This integrated approach not only enhances customer satisfaction and attachment but also differentiates cafés in competitive markets and supports sustainable growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following are the recommendations. The following are the recommendations.

### Café Owner and Other Small Business Entrepreneurs

- To continuing to enhance their customer-centric strategies by focusing on customer orientation, relationship-building, and innovativeness in their products and services
- To improve personalized customer experiences by recognizing repeat customers, responding actively to feedback, and creating welcoming service environments that encourage long-term relationships with patrons

### LGUs, Tourism offices, Chambers of Commerce

- To support cafés and small businesses by promoting heritage-based tourism initiatives that highlight Bukidnon's culture, local products, and culinary identity.
- to organize training programs, workshops, or seminars that help entrepreneurs strengthen customer service practices, branding strategies, and business innovation.

### Students and Aspiring entrepreneurs

- To Students and aspiring entrepreneurs to use the findings of this study as a guide in developing customer-oriented business ideas, particularly in the food and café industry.
- To learn the importance of combining strong branding with authentic service experiences and cultural identity, which can help businesses build stronger customer loyalty.

### Small and Medium-sized enterprises

- To apply customer-centric strategies such as personalized service, responsiveness, and relationship marketing to strengthen customer loyalty.
- To also consider incorporating local culture, traditions, and community identity into their brand positioning to create stronger emotional connections with customers.

### Future Researchers

- To explore other variables that may influence customer loyalty, such as service quality, customer satisfaction, experiential marketing, social media engagement, or café ambiance.
- To also conduct similar studies in other municipalities or provinces to compare customer loyalty patterns in different business environments.

### Compliance To Ethical Standards

Before the gathering of data, the researcher will seek the ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Lourdes College. Hence, In the conduct of data gathering for this study, the Belmont Principles of Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice are strictly upheld to ensure ethical research practice.

Respect for Persons is observed by securing informed consent from all respondents, ensuring their voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without any consequence. Beneficence is maintained by protecting participants from harm, safeguarding their personal information, and ensuring that the data collected are used solely for academic purposes to contribute positively to knowledge and practice in customer

loyalty research. Lastly, Justice is applied by treating all participants fairly and equitably, selecting respondents based on research relevance rather than convenience, and ensuring that no group is unduly burdened or excluded from the potential benefits of the study.

Once this will be sought, permission letter will be given to the selected cafés in Bukidnon for their approval. During the floating out of the research instruments, the researcher will ensure that consent will be sought. By doing so, the participants will know what will happen to their information, and how will their information be used later. The explicit data retention policy will consider the nature of data collected, ethical and legal imperative as relevant. Participant's privacy will be maintained by eliminating personal identifiers as soon as possible. To prevent unauthorized access, data will be kept safe from theft and/or loss. Only the researcher and the research team will be able to see these.

Once the data retention period ends, they will be safely and permanently destroyed. All paper documents will be shredded while computer files will be permanently deleted to prevent further access. When these procedures are in place, the participants can be assured that their privacy is maintained and that their responses will not be misused during and after the research.

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