



Journal of Advanced Research in Marketing and Management

Journal homepage:
<https://karyailham.com.my/index.php/jarmm/index>
ISSN: 3083-9653



Driving Brand Loyalty: An Analysis of Millennial Tech Preferences in Urban Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 April 2026
Received in revised form 25 May 2026
Accepted 2 June 2026
Available online 15 July 2026

Keywords:

Brand loyalty; emotional connection; product quality; millennials; consumer behaviour; technology gadgets

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the increasing need to understand key drivers of customer satisfaction in highly competitive retail environments. Despite extensive research on service quality, product quality, and pricing, limited studies have examined the integrated effects of these factors within Malaysian brick-and-mortar retail settings. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of service quality, product quality, and price-saving orientation on customer satisfaction at AEON Bukit Tinggi, Malaysia. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured survey administered to 478 AEON customers. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis. The results indicate that all three variables significantly and positively influence customer satisfaction ($p < 0.001$), with product quality emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by service quality and price-saving orientation. These findings support Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, suggesting that satisfaction increases when customer expectations regarding service, product value, and pricing are met or exceeded. The study concludes that an integrated strategy combining high service standards, superior product quality, and value-oriented pricing is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction and fostering customer loyalty in the retail sector.

1. Introduction

This study explores the key elements influencing brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials, focusing on brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour. Brand loyalty is defined as a consumer's emotional or behavioural commitment to continuously repurchase and recommend a brand's products. In the tech industry, where competition is intense and innovation is constant, brand loyalty plays a critical role in ensuring customer retention, driving repeat purchases, and sustaining long-term profitability [28]. Tech gadgets, particularly smartphones, have become indispensable in the lives of millennials, serving as multifunctional devices that combine communication tools, personal assistants, and entertainment hubs. The industry has expanded rapidly due to advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G networks, and the Internet of Things (IoT), which continue to reshape consumer expectations

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and require stronger brand loyalty strategies [20]. Despite strong growth in the tech industry, maintaining brand loyalty among millennials remains challenging. Consumers are highly exposed to alternatives and frequently switch brands when expectations are not met. This highlights the importance of understanding the key drivers of loyalty in a competitive digital marketplace.

1.1 Background of the Study

Brand loyalty has become an essential component for businesses in the highly competitive tech gadget industry, especially among millennials. This is because consumers today can easily switch brands when expectations are not satisfied. Brand loyalty is no longer only about repeat purchase behaviour but also about emotional connection and value alignment. Evidence from McKinsey and Company [18] revealed that more than 65% of consumers switched brands due to dissatisfaction with product quality, lack of personalization, or misalignment with values.

In the tech gadget sector, brand loyalty is influenced by brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour. Millennials and Gen Z consumers prioritize brands that reflect innovation, sustainability, and social responsibility [27]. Unlike earlier generations, they place stronger emphasis on emotional connection rather than price alone. In the digital era, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter play a major role in shaping brand loyalty. These platforms allow brands to engage consumers in real time and build emotional relationships [3]. However, many companies struggle to keep up with rapidly changing consumer expectations, which may lead to reduced loyalty and competitiveness.

1.2 Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty among millennials is influenced by several key factors:

1.2.1 Brand perception

Brand perception plays a critical role in shaping trust and long-term loyalty, as consumers evaluate brands based on reputation and values such as sustainability [12].

1.2.2 Product quality

Product quality is another important factor, as it determines satisfaction, performance, and durability of tech gadgets [27].

1.2.3 Emotional connection

Emotional connection strengthens loyalty when consumers feel a personal bond with a brand through storytelling and experience-based marketing [16].

1.2.4 Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour, including social media influence, online reviews, and influencer marketing, significantly shapes purchase decisions in the digital environment [20].

1.3 Problem Statement

Brand loyalty in the tech gadget industry, particularly among millennials, remains a significant challenge due to rapidly evolving consumer expectations and intense market competition. Millennials tend to switch brands when they experience dissatisfaction with product quality, customer service, or a perceived lack of value alignment, making loyalty difficult to sustain [27]. In addition, emotional connection has emerged as a critical concern, as millennials increasingly expect brands to reflect their personal identity and values. While leading brands such as Apple and Samsung have successfully established strong emotional attachment with consumers, many others struggle to achieve similar levels of loyalty [3]. Prior studies by Salem *et al.*, [23] also suggest that brand love plays a crucial role in enhancing emotional loyalty and long-term commitment. Furthermore, brand perception significantly influences loyalty, as consumers evaluate brands based on their reputation, credibility, and ethical values. Negative perceptions can erode trust and weaken long-term customer relationships [12]. At the same time, consumer behaviour is increasingly shaped by digital platforms, particularly social media and influencer marketing, which strongly affect purchasing decisions. Brands that fail to adapt to these digital engagement trends risk losing both market share and customer loyalty [20]. Despite these insights, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of how brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour collectively influence brand loyalty among millennials in the Malaysian tech gadget industry, highlighting a critical gap that this study aims to address.

1.4 Research Objectives

Specifically, this study aims to:

RO1: To examine the influence of brand perception on brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia.

RO2: To analyse the effect of product quality on brand loyalty in the tech gadget market among millennials in Malaysia.

RO3: To evaluate the role of emotional connection in driving brand loyalty among millennials in Malaysia.

RO4: To assess how consumer behaviour contributes to brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does brand perception influence brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia?

RQ2: What is the effect of product quality on brand loyalty in the tech gadget market among millennials in Malaysia?

RQ3: What role does emotional connection play in driving brand loyalty among millennials in Malaysia?

RQ4: How does consumer behaviour contribute to brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders, including consumers, businesses, marketers, industry practitioners, and policymakers. For consumers, particularly millennials, it enhances awareness and supports more informed purchasing decisions based on brand values, product quality, and emotional connection [21]. For tech companies, the findings provide actionable insights to strengthen branding strategies, improve customer engagement, and enhance long-term customer retention [10]. For marketers, the study underscores the importance of emotional branding and effective digital engagement strategies in building stronger brand loyalty [2]. At the industry level, the study contributes to the development of more effective customer relationship management practices by encouraging innovation and a stronger focus on sustainable brand strategies [15]. Finally, for policymakers, the findings highlight the need to promote ethical marketing practices and greater transparency in digital branding, ensuring fair and trustworthy consumer environments in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace [7].

2. Literature Review

This study uses the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model to understand how certain factors influence brand loyalty among millennials who use tech gadgets. The S-O-R model, introduced by Mehrabian *et al.*, [18], explains how external stimuli affect individuals' internal states, such as thoughts and emotions, which then lead to behavioural responses. In this study, the stimulus refers to factors such as brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour. These factors influence how millennials feel about a brand, including their level of trust and emotional attachment. These internal evaluations then lead to the response, which in this case is brand loyalty, such as repeat purchases or recommendations to others. Millennials today are highly active on social media and often rely on online information before choosing which tech brand to support. As shown by Lee *et al.*, [16], millennials often become loyal to brands not only because the products perform well, but also because the brands align with their values and lifestyle. The S-O-R model therefore provides a useful framework for explaining how exposure to brand-related stimuli leads to emotional responses and ultimately to loyalty. This makes the model highly suitable for studying brand loyalty among millennials, particularly in the context of smartphones, laptops, and other digital gadgets. This study also applies the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which explains how individuals' intentions influence their actual behaviour. TPB suggests that behaviour is shaped by three main factors: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In this study, brand perception and product quality influence millennials' attitudes, while emotional connection reflects subjective norms through social influence and peer engagement. Consumer behaviour relates to perceived behavioural control, where ease of access and convenience affect loyalty decisions. Millennials, who are highly active on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, are strongly influenced by their online networks, including reviews and influencer recommendations. These factors collectively explain why millennials choose to remain loyal to a particular tech brand. Previous research identifies multiple key drivers of brand loyalty, particularly among millennials. Foundational work by Bennett *et al.*, [1] highlights trusts and customer satisfaction as core determinants of loyalty, while more recent studies emphasize the growing importance of emotional and digital factors. For instance, Nguyen [21] and Chen [3] demonstrate that emotional engagement and branding significantly enhance customer attachment and loyalty. In contrast, Merriman [20] notes that millennials are more likely to switch brands when they encounter dissatisfaction or poor experiences, indicating a lower tolerance for unmet expectations. The role of

digital environments is further reinforced by Lee *et al.*, [16], who emphasize that interactive digital engagement strengthens brand relationships. Similarly, Salem *et al.*, [23] show that brand love acts as a mediating factor between social media engagement and loyalty development. In the context of tech products, Wang *et al.*, [26] confirm that product quality remains a critical driver of loyalty. Supporting these findings, Vodus Research [25] reports that in Malaysia, millennials' brand preferences and loyalty are increasingly shaped by online platforms, where social media, influencer marketing, and e-commerce interactions play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviours. Overall, existing studies consistently show that brand loyalty is influenced by emotional, behavioural, and functional factors. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these factors interact specifically among Malaysian millennials in the tech gadget industry.

2.1 Hypotheses Development

2.1.1 The relationship between brand perception and brand loyalty

Brand perception is about how people see and feel about a brand. According to the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model by Mehrabian *et al.*, [19], brand perception is the stimulus that affects how consumers feel inside, such as trust and confidence, which then leads to brand loyalty. When millennials view a brand as trustworthy, innovative, or aligned with their values, they are more likely to stay loyal to it. Research by Keller [11] and Lee *et al.*, [17] supports that a strong brand image increases customer trust and loyalty.

2.1.2 The relationship between product quality and brand loyalty

Product quality means how well a product performs, how long it lasts, and whether it meets users' needs. Based on the S-O-R model, good product quality is a stimulus that makes people feel satisfied, which leads to brand loyalty. Millennials often stay loyal to tech brands that offer reliable, durable, and innovative gadgets. Kim and Lee [13] found that when products work well and meet expectations, customers are more likely to keep buying from the same brand.

2.1.3 The relationship between emotional connection and brand loyalty

An emotional connection is the bond or feeling a customer has with a brand. In the S-O-R model, this connection is a stimulus that leads to feelings such as pride or happiness, which encourages brand loyalty. Millennials often choose brands that make them feel understood or reflect their identity. Research by Chen and Zhao [4] shows that brands that create emotional bonds with customers are more likely to be supported and recommended.

2.1.4 The relationship between consumer behaviour and brand loyalty

Consumer behaviour includes how people make choices, such as reading reviews, following influencers, or using social media. In the S-O-R model, these online activities are stimuli that influence how consumers think and feel, which results in brand loyalty. Hossain *et al.*, [9] explain that millennials often follow what others say online before buying. Brands that are active and engaging online are more likely to earn millennials' loyalty.

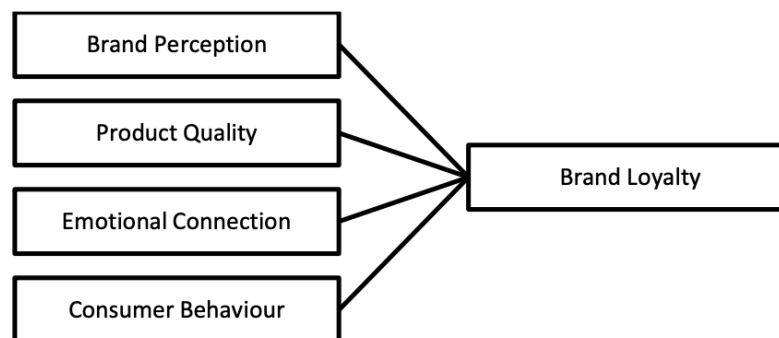


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research design to understand what keeps Millennials loyal to certain tech brands. Using a cross-sectional survey, we collected data at a single point in time to look closely at four key areas: brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behavior. Our goal was to see exactly how these four factors drive brand loyalty and to provide practical advice for tech companies looking to connect with younger shoppers. To ensure the results were accurate and reliable, all data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. This study focused on Millennials who are born between 1981 and 1996 living in Setia Alam, Shah Alam. We chose this specific township because it is a rapidly growing urban hub known for its modern lifestyle and highly tech-savvy residents such as 5G availability and smart home features. To find the right participants, we used a snowball sampling method, reaching out to active technology users who follow tech brands online. Following the guidelines by Krejcie and Morgan [14], we targeted a sample of 375 respondents to ensure our results were both reliable and meaningful. To keep the data diverse and balanced, we included men and women from a wide variety of educational and professional backgrounds. We collected data using a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The survey was designed in English and shared through Google Forms, social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, and some face-to-face interactions to ensure a good reach. English is a primary medium for tech communication and education among Malaysian Millennials. To maintain high research standards, all measurement items were adapted from established studies and slightly adjusted to fit the tech gadget context. We used Cronbach's Alpha to check the reliability of our data; all scores were above 0.7, which confirms that our survey was consistent and reliable. The study measured five key areas: brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, consumer behavior, and brand loyalty. Table 1 presents the results of the reliability and validity tests for the study variables. All constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.80, indicating high internal consistency and reliability. The factor loadings exceeded 0.7 for all items, which meets the standards of construct validity [6] Composite reliability scores also surpassed 0.80, confirming strong reliability of the measurement scales [8].

Table 1

Validity and reliability

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Perception	9	0.84	0.87
Product Quality	6	0.81	0.85
Emotional Connection	6	0.87	0.89
Consumer Behaviour	7	0.85	0.88
Brand Loyalty	5	0.86	0.89

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Profile

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 2. The sample consists of 380 respondents, with a fairly balanced gender distribution: 195 males (51.2%) and 205 females (48.8%). Regarding age, most respondents fall into the 31–35 years category (48.0%), followed by 36–40 years (24.5%) and 25–30 years (27.5%). In terms of occupation, a majority are employed (56.0%), with students making up 23.0% and unemployed respondents at 21.0%. When asked about the type of gadget they frequently use, smartwatches were the most common (34.5%), followed by laptops (32.0%), tablets (17.8%), and smartphones (15.8%). Regarding how often respondents upgrade their gadgets, the largest group reported upgrading more than every 3 years (38.5%), followed by those who upgrade every 2–3 years (30.3%), every 6 months (15.8%), and once a year (15.5%).

Table 2
Demographic descriptive (N = 380)

Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	51.2
	Female	48.8
Age	25-30	27.5
	31-35	48.0
	36-40	24.5
Occupation	Employed	56.0
	Student	23.0
	Unemployed	21.0
Frequently Used Gadget	Smartphone	15.8
	Laptop	32.0

4.2 Correlation Results

Table 3 shows that all four independent variables i.e. brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour significantly and positively influence brand loyalty among millennials. Emotional connection had the strongest impact ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.001$), followed by consumer behaviour ($r = 0.688$, $p < 0.001$), brand perception ($r = 0.654$, $p < 0.001$), and product quality ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3
Correlation

Variable	Correlation with Brand Loyalty	Significance (p-value)
Brand Perception	0.654	$p < 0.001$
Product Quality	0.612	$p < 0.001$
Emotional Connection	0.721	$p < 0.001$
Consumer Behaviour	0.688	$p < 0.001$

4.3 Regression Analysis Results

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of consumer behaviour, emotional attachment, product quality, and brand perception on the dependent variable. The results shown in Table 4 indicate a strong relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.915. This suggests a very high level of

association between the predictors and the outcome variable. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.837, indicating that approximately 83.7% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by consumer behaviour, emotional attachment, product quality, and brand perception. This reflects a substantial explanatory power of the model. It also indicates that all predictors contribute meaningfully to the model. Furthermore, the standard error of the estimate is 0.45167, which shows a relatively low level of prediction error, implying that the model provides accurate estimates of the dependent variable

Table 4

Regression result

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate
1	.915a	.837	.837	.45167

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer Behaviour, Emotional Attachment, Product Quality, Brand Perception

4.4 ANOVA Results

The ANOVA results in Table 5 indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant. The model shows an F-value of 508.820 with a significance level $p < 0.001$. This result suggests that the independent variables (consumer behaviour, emotional attachment, product quality, and brand perception) collectively have a significant effect on the brand loyalty. The highly significant F-statistic confirms that the model is statistically reliable and meaningful for explaining the brand loyalty. Profile Categories Percentage (%) Gender Male 51.2 Female 48.8 Age 25–30 27.5 31–35 48.0 36–40 24.5 Occupation Employed 56.0 Student 23.0 Unemployed 21.0 Frequently Used Gadget Smartphone 15.8 Laptop 32.0 Journal of XX Volume XX, Issue X (2019) XX-XX 8 Smartwatch 34.5 Tablet 17.8 Frequency of Gadget Upgrade Every 6 month 15.8 Once a year 15.5 Every 2–3 years 30.3 More than 3 years 38.5

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Table 5

Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	872.906	4	218.226	508.820	.000 ^b
Residual	169.525	395	0.429		
Total	1042.431	399			

4.5 Hypothesis Testing Results

The main objective of this study was to examine the factors influencing brand loyalty among Millennial consumers, focusing on brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour. The findings confirm that all four independent variables significantly influence brand loyalty among Millennials. All four objectives were successfully achieved. The findings confirm

that brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour collectively play a significant role in shaping Millennial brand loyalty in the tech gadget industry.

H1: Brand perception has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia.

The results strongly support Hypothesis 1, with a t-value of 5.467 ($p < 0.001$). This confirms a significant positive relationship between brand perception and brand loyalty. The findings suggest that when millennials view a brand as trustworthy, reputable, and aligned with their personal values, they are far more likely to stay loyal to it. This result aligns with the work of Keller [11] and Lee *et al.*, [17], who noted that a powerful brand image is a key driver of consumer loyalty. In today's digital world, this perception is no longer just about a logo; it is deeply shaped by a brand's online presence, its commitment to social responsibility, and the overall experience it provides to the user.

H2: Product quality has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty in the tech gadget market among millennials in Malaysia.

The results confirm Hypothesis 2 with a t-value of 4.115 ($p < 0.001$), showing that product quality is a major driver of brand loyalty. For millennials, loyalty is built on tangible results; they prioritize high performance, durability, and innovation when choosing their tech gadgets. This finding is consistent with the research of Kim and Lee [13] who established that high-quality products are the foundation of consumer trust and long-term commitment. Furthermore, our results align with Sidik *et al.*, [24], who found that in the Malaysian context, a brand's technical competence and the reliability of its products are essential for keeping customers loyal.

H3: Emotional connection has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty among millennials in Malaysia.

Hypothesis 3 is the most strongly supported in this study, with a t-value of 8.369 ($p < 0.001$). This result confirms that emotional connection is the single most significant predictor of brand loyalty among millennials. It reveals that for this demographic, choosing a tech brand is not just a rational decision based on specs; it is a deeply emotional one. Millennials gravitate toward brands that mirror their personal identity, lifestyle, and social values. This finding aligns with the research of Chen and Zhao [4] and Chinomona [5], who argued that strong emotional attachment is the key to driving repeat purchases and turning regular customers into vocal brand advocates. In the competitive tech market, an emotional bond acts as the "glue" that keeps users loyal even when other options are available.

H4: Consumer behavior has a significant positive contribution to brand loyalty toward tech gadgets among millennials in Malaysia.

The results support Hypothesis 4 with a strong t-value of 6.784 ($p < 0.001$), confirming that consumer behavior is a vital driver of brand loyalty. This shows that the way millennials interact with brands, specifically through digital platforms which directly dictates how loyal they become. In today's market, millennials rely heavily on social media, online reviews, and influencer recommendations to guide their choices. This finding is backed by Hossain *et al.* [9] and Rahman *et al.* [22], who noted that digital engagement is now a cornerstone of loyalty behavior. Furthermore,

these results reflect the trends reported by Vodus Research [24], which highlights that online habits and digital interactions are the primary forces shaping brand preferences among younger consumers in Malaysia. Table 6 presents the results of hypothesis testing examining the relationships between brand perception, product quality, emotional connection, and consumer behaviour on brand loyalty. All four hypotheses (H1–H4) are supported, indicating that each independent variable has a statistically significant positive effect on brand loyalty among millennials ($p < 0.05$).

Table 6
Hypothesis testing result

Hypothesis	Beta (β)	t-value	R ²	Result
H1: Brand perception has a positive effect on loyalty	0.223	5.467	0.837	Supported
H2: Product quality had a positive effect on loyalty	0.161	4.115	0.837	Supported
H3: Emotional connection has a positive effect on loyalty	0.297	8.369	0.837	Supported
H4: Consumer behaviour has a positive effect on loyalty	0.275	6.784	0.837	Supported

p-value < 0.005, indicating statistically significant relationship

5. Limitations of the Study

While the findings offer significant insights into the drivers of brand loyalty, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the data collection was centred in Setia Alam, a premier, high-growth township in Malaysia. While this location was strategically chosen as a 'digital microcosm' due to its modern lifestyle and high tech-engagement, the consumer behavior patterns observed here may reflect an 'early adopter' trend that is not yet universal across all Malaysian regions. Second, while our sample of 380 respondents provides a robust statistical foundation for urban analysis, it may not fully capture the vast socio-economic and cultural diversity of the Millennial generation across the entire nation. Additionally, as a cross-sectional study, this research provides a vital 'snapshot' of current tech preferences; however, it does not account for the fluid nature of brand loyalty as it evolves over time. Furthermore, while the online survey method was the most effective way to reach this digitally-native demographic, we recognize the inherent potential for self-reporting bias. Finally, while we focused on four core determinants to provide a deep, specialized analysis, we acknowledge that emerging factors such as price volatility, environmental sustainability, and localized cultural shifts remain fertile ground for future research to explore.

6. Recommendations

Moving forward, we envision several pathways to deepen our understanding of the evolving millennial tech landscape. First, while this study focused on a specific urban hub, future research could embrace geographic diversity by exploring rural communities in Malaysia or conducting crosscultural comparisons with other emerging economies. These studies will show if putting emotions before technical features is a nationwide change, or if it only happens in fast-growing urban areas. Second, we encourage a move toward longitudinal and mixed-method approaches. While surveys provide the 'what,' engaging millennials through focus groups or interviews would uncover the 'why,' capturing the fluid nature of brand loyalty as it matures over time. Furthermore, the 'loyalty equation' is clearly expanding. Future models would benefit from integrating contemporary variables such as price sensitivity, environmental sustainability, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). We should look at how social media influencers act as the new 'trusted experts' who help millennials decide which tech brands to follow. Finally, we recommend studying the customer's

experience after the sale is over. Understanding how brands stay connected with people after they start using the tech is the real secret to building long-term loyalty.

7. Conclusion

This study shows that for Millennials, brand loyalty isn't just about the device itself, it's about how the brand makes them feel. We found that while quality and perception matter, a strong emotional connection is the most powerful reason this generation stays loyal to a tech brand. Our findings paint a clear picture of the modern Malaysian Millennial: they are emotionally driven, techsavvy, and expect high quality. For brands to succeed in this market, they must go beyond simply selling a product. They need to build real relationships, stay active in the digital world, and consistently deliver reliable gadgets. Even though this study focused on a specific urban area, it provides a vital roadmap for understanding what truly keeps the Malaysian tech consumer coming back.

Acknowledgements

This research was not funded by any grant.

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