

**STORE IMAGE AND BRAND ATTITUDE ON  
RETAIL SERVICE QUALITY AND  
CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY  
AMONG PETROL STATIONS IN KLANG  
VALLEY, MALAYSIA**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY**

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STORE IMAGE AND BRAND ATTITUDE ON RETAIL SERVICE  
QUALITY AND CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY AMONG  
PETROL STATIONS IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between retail service quality and customer-based brand equity. For this reason, it explores the role of store image, chain store image and brand attitude in forming customer-based brand equity of petrol stations in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A pilot study on thirty petrol station customers was used to test the items with Cronbach's alpha. Self-administered and structured questionnaires were amended accordingly and distributed in front of petrol station in Klang Valley to 450 petrol station customers. The customers were approached personally using purposive and convenience sampling. Screening questions were asked prior to handing over the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately, keyed into SPSS version 25, cleaned and used for initial tests. PLSsc in ADANCO 2.1.1 was used to test twenty hypotheses, addressing six research questions. The outcome indicate physical aspect, reliability and policy dimensions of retail service quality having positive relationships with store image with effect size 0.341, 0.169 and 0.154 respectively. The reliability and policy dimensions show positive relationship with chain store image with effect size of 0.314 and 0.174. The overall RSQ has direct positive relationship with customer-based brand equity but showed weak effect size of 0.056. This indicated the mediating effects of store image and store brand attitude, with bootstrapping quantiles showing no '0' between significance level of 2.5% and 99.5%. Theoretically, even though this study proofs perceived quality is an element of customer-based brand equity, the indirect relationship through store image and store brand attitude pave a stronger path. Furthermore, this study also shows chain store effect on store brand attitude and customer-based brand equity is through store image. Thus, it is important for petrol stations to build individual store image and brand attitude using key retail service quality dimensions.

## APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The student has been supervised by: **Dr. Gomathi Shamuganathan**

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Examiner 1

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**Universiti Sains Malaysia**

Examiner 2

This thesis was submitted to Asia e University and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



.....  
Professor Dr Siow Heng Loke  
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Chairman, Examination Committee  
[26 June 2023]

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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**Signature of Candidate:**

**Date: 26 June 2023**



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

CBBE	Customer Based Brand Equity
RSQ	Retail Service Quality
SERVQUAL	Service Quality
RATER	Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, Responsiveness
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
DoSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
AI	Artificial Intelligence
IT	Information Technology
RFID	Radio-frequency Identification
CEIC	Computer and Enterprise Investigation Conference
RON	Research Octane Number
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
CAPEX	Capital Expenditure

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter introduction

The 2021 Global Retail Development Index shows retail industry's contribution to world GDP has fallen to about 11% to 12%. This industry employs an estimated 35 million people, as such, it is as critical to the global economy as manufacturing. Pre-Covid 19, retail industry was known as a critical industry that contributed annually an estimated 31% to the world GDP (Businesswire, 2016). The retail industry in Malaysia had a turnover of RM537.6 billion in 2019 (The Malaysian Reserve, 2019; Murugiah, 2019). During post Covid 19 pandemic, 2021 contribution dropped to RM120.5 billion. Mordor Intelligence states the retail sector in Malaysia is categorised into Food and beverages, Personal and Household Care, Apparel, Footwear, Accessories, Furniture, Toys and Hobby, Electronic and Household Appliances, and other products. The retail outlets as distribution channel includes supermarket/hypermarket, convenience stores, and specialty stores, online and others. This has continuously evolved over the years, providing more convenience and visibility to customers.

It is crucial for the retail industry to have sufficient footfalls that result in customer purchase. Small and Mediums-sized Enterprise (SME) association of Malaysia vice president, Chin Chee Seong stated, due to the pandemic, many retail outlets have closed down. (Nur Hanani Azman, The Malaysian Reserves, 2022). Amidst the Covid 19 pandemic, the Malaysian retail revenue has generally indicated a slump due to the decrease in footfalls (Retail Trends in Malaysia, 2020). When the government began to relax the Movement Control Order, more customers began to revisit retail outlets, including petrol stations, as reflected in income recovery reported

in August 2020 (Harizah Kamel, The Malaysian Reserve, 2020). Following this, the Retail Group Malaysia (RGM) reported growth rate of 3.4% in sales in quarter two of 2021. Retail was one of the hardest hit industries, the Malaysia Retail Chain Association (MRCA) President Shirley Tay indicated that 2022 would be a better year (Nur Hanani Azman, The Malaysian Reserve, 2022). Following this, August 2020 Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM), reported significant improvement in monthly sales value, specifically comparing sales value for June 2020 and July 2020.

Nevertheless, what is consistent and notable in all retail concepts is customer's expectation with regards to service quality offered by the retail, immaterial whether it is online or offline retail (Bhat and Darzi, 2020). In this complex industry, service quality as perceived by customers can be perplexing and it can be more confounding as which or whose quality is being evaluated by end users. For instance, petrol and diesel retailers can be providers of core products (petrol and diesel), provider of services such as cafes and mini -market store which offers products from various manufacturers. These retail items are highly dependent on manufacturers as much as service providers and retailers. In Malaysia, the urban petrol stations provide all three services while in the rural areas, only the core product (petrol and diesel) and/or mini market are offered. A paradigm shift in the retail industry in improving their service quality is crucial for survival as retail competition, both physical store and internet has become ubiquitous and prolific (Retail Trends in Malaysia, 2020; Roggeveen and Sethuraman, 2020). As such the current research aims to understand the relationship between retail service quality (RSQ) and customer-based brand equity (CBBE). In doing so, it further aims to understand the both direct relationship and indirect relationship roles played by store image, chain store image and store brand attitude in CBBE model.

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It begins with the background of context of this study to explain the reasons for selecting petrol station in Klang valley as the retail. The chapter further provides a summary of the literature that postulated the key theoretical frameworks where the research conceptual framework is derived from. As such, it entails the gaps identified in the literature and lists the research objectives, research questions and their corresponding hypotheses. Prior to outlining the entire thesis, this chapter presents brief outlook of the research contributions.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

Researchers and businessmen alike have shown keen interest on synonymous yet different business jargons such as branding, brand equity, market share, customer services and service quality. Having said this, these jargons and what they stand for are crucial for business knowledge expansion and innovative application as businesses differ in what and how products and services are sold and rendered (Blut et al., 2018; Kotler et al., 2015). Retail is where products and services are displayed, and the point where purchasing customers and end users come into contact. The retail industry is complex, mainly because retailers vary from pure service providers, pure product sellers and products and services sellers (Hyeon Mo Jeon, Se Ran Yoo, 2021; Colicev, Malshe and Pauwels, 2018).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century business are undergoing constant change with an increasing innovation of marketing concepts and competitiveness. The use of technology such as the internet and the smartphone have revolutionised new forms of marketing such as online and mobile retailing. Furthermore, Covid 19 pandemic has ascertained the importance and convenience of online and mobile retailing. According to Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) besides creative and innovative goods and services, creative



marketing channels and advertising platforms are also gaining attention of users and potential customers. Although, the development in technology and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in retail has now lessen the number of face to face interaction at some retail (Retail Trends in Malaysia, 2020; Roggeveen and Sethuraman, 2020), products and services such as dental, medical services and petrol/diesel still require customers' presence at the physical retail outlet. Having stated that, the new generation of customers are constantly looking for technologically advanced, hassle-free and convenient retail platforms, urging retailing concept, physical or online, to continuously change to meet expectations (Shankar, Kalyanam, Setia, Golmohammadi, Tirunillai, Douglass, Hennessey, Bull and waddoups, 2021; Reinartz et al., 2019).

Retailing tenets state, online and physical retail stores fail because they struggle to keep up with continuous changes in logistics, politics and environment in the last two decades (Berman et al., 2018; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Allaway et al., 2011; Zentes et al., 2007). Physical retail outlets in many main cities around the world are now using new technology such as mobile payment and self-check-out counters for quick transactions and to reduce human error, accommodating all generations of customers and continual survival of retail. Pantano et al. (2022) found that technology in retail is not conducive for the older generation due to excess of information on online platforms, lack of assistance from personnel and technological tools. This generation is also perceived as incapable of using information technology (IT) and shop autonomously. Therefore, technology may not completely replace brick and mortar retailing, but technology will definitely be used in all forms of retail and in a myriad of retail sections such as radio-frequency identification (RFID) scanning at cash counter and contactless payment methods.

Service quality continues to be an important for both academic research and management in the retail sector (Zygiaris, et al., 2022; Saricam, 2021; Simmers and Keith, 2015; Shiffman, Kanuk and Hansen, 2012; Lovelock et al., 2005). Service quality is valuable to retailers as it is a primary source of competitive advantage (Nunkoo et al., 2020; Sultan and Wong, 2019; Simmers and Keith, 2015; Lovelock et al., 2005; Kuei, 1998).

Zygiaris et al. (2022) recommends a large scale trained human resource to fulfill the need in service areas especially in retail to offer better quality of service and sustain customer satisfaction. With bigger clientele to service, the retail sector often face massive challenges in retaining and increasing customer loyalty. Exceptional service quality tends to satisfy customers who are highly likely to transform into loyal customers (Rather and Camilleri, 2019; Kotler et al., 2015; Demirci-Orel and Kara, 2014; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Saravanan and Rao, 2007; Rohini and Mahadevappa, 2006; Pakdil and Harwood, 2005; Chen, 2004). Moreover, customers in retail sector are known to be in the repertoire market, having more than one brand of retail outlet in their favourite list (Malshe and Al-Khatib, 2017; Firth, 2015; East et al., 2008; McIntosh, 2000). As such, a customer tends to switch quite often but remaining within a small list of preferred retailers (Blut et al., 2018; Firth, 2015; East, et al., 2008).

Having reviewed a vast number of academic journal articles on retail service quality, and retailing, it was found that a petrol station is ultimately a retail outlet, directly selling to end users. Petrol stations in Malaysia carry their petrol brand name, thus hardly differentiated with a retail brand name. Malaysian consumers would refer to the petrol station by the brand of fuel it carries and the station's location. Therefore, retail service quality attributes are what customers respond to so as to form perceptions on the petrol station. According to the Malaysian Road Transport Department

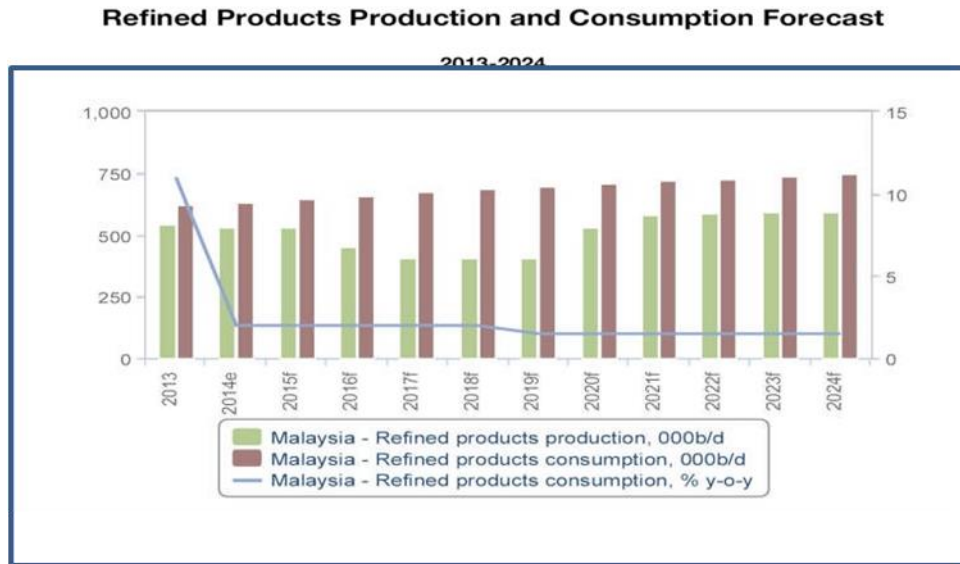
transportation statistics, as of December 2019 there were 31.2 million vehicles registered in Malaysia and since then has had a steady increase quarterly, averaging at 76,737 vehicles (Road Transport Department, as cited in Lim, 2020; Muller, 2020). These customers are serviced by around 3800 petrol stations throughout the nation in 2020 (Augustin, 2020).

Petrol consumption alone in average show an increase of 308.95 barrel/day (CEIC, n.d.). The bar chart 1.1 below shows the refined production and consumption forecast from 2013 to 2024 showing a continued increase. Thus, indicating a proliferating need to use petrol stations for one reason or another. There are five major petrol/diesel brands in Malaysia, these are Petronas, Shell, Petron, BHPetrol and Caltex operating 3800 petrol station (Augustin, 2020). In 2020, the entrance of the petrol brand FIVE, managed by Seng Group, was anticipated to open another 200 stations nationwide (Chan, 2020). The petrol stations generally sell three grades of petroleum, namely RON97, RON95 and diesel. Petron added a new variant called RON100 and Shell added V-Power fuel. The prices of RON95 petrol and diesel were subsidized by the government of Malaysia, up to end November 2014. Since 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014, the government had announced that the retail prices for RON97, RON95 and diesel is fixed according to a managed float and scrapped its fuel subsidy program (Zuhri Azam Ahmad and Sukumaran, 2014). The government subsidy was gradually removed and a new programme was introduced on January 1, 2020 and price change was made every Friday (Kaos, 2019; MyPf, 2019).

Meanwhile, petrol and diesel retailers in Malaysia face difficulties in trying to differentiate their brands, and retain customers due to the homogenous nature of the core product sold. Most petrol stations in the urban areas operate convenient store which is attached to the stations and the products sold in these stores are mostly similar.

Thus petrol station retailers have been changing their concept and patrons sometimes walk in for products and services other than the core product sold. Meanwhile service is highly dependent on the individual station and their employees.

**Figure 1.1: Forecast of refined product consumption**



Source: BMI, Energy Commission of Malaysia, EIA

Most of these stations are also fitted with one or more automated teller machines (ATM) of various banks and a few stations have their own in-built coffee shop. Stations along higher traffic routes are different from the regular stations, offering coffee chains, fast food chains, car workshops, and car wash that are independently operated. Therefore, the attraction towards a station is based on the brand of petrol, convenience store, and all other stores and facilities attached to the petrol station. Having said that, when there is little or no difference in products, services provided by the individual stations play a critical role in gaining loyalty and establishing CBBE (Cambra-Fierro, Fuentes-Blasco, Huerta-Alvarez and Olavarría, 2021; Jung et al., 2019; Safranic et al., 2017; Cetina, Dumitrescu, Tichindelean and Opreana, 2015). The pricing of fuel is controlled by the government, therefore there is no differentiation in price of different brands of petrol or diesel. Petrol stations often run promotions by

offering free gifts when a customer purchases a certain amount of fuel i.e, occasional promotional activities such as free gifts like free 600ml mineral water bottle for every purchase of fuel worth RM50 and above, are the only way petrol stations can differentiate price.

Petrol retailing is also an expensive retail business in Malaysia. The cost of doing business is huge as the working capital and security deposit is an estimated RM 270,000 for a Petronas petrol brand franchise to RM 550,000 for a Shell petrol or Caltex petrol brand franchise (Petronas, 2020; Caltex, 219; Capital.my, 2020). For every purchase of fuel from any of the big five petroleum companies, petrol retailers put an upfront cash anywhere between RM 150,000 to RM 250,000 per purchase (Lye, 2020; Augustin, 2020). Moreover, the petrol retailers cannot refuse delivery of fuel as the fuel stock is managed by the companies that supply the fuel.

The petrol retailers also pay rental, maintenance, system charges, credit charges, electricity, utility bills, and manpower cost which can amount to between RM30,000 to RM70,000 (Augustin, 2020; Kong 2019). However, the profit margin earned by retailers is at 15 sen per liter of RON95 and RON97 sold and 10 sen per liter for diesel (Kong, 2019), making it a lucrative retail if the number of footfalls or patronage is increased or retained. Recently, Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs in 2021 awarded Shell Malaysia with The Best Convenience Retailing Store award based on the retailer's initiatives in supporting local SMEs and helping communities in need by setting up the charity drop box and dry food bank.

Previous studies on petrol retailers have found that service quality is an important consideration for their customers to make decision on the choice of petrol station (Hauwa Saleh Dutsenwai et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2013; Helgesen et al., 2010). Service quality in retail outlets such as petrol stations can be key to increase footfalls

and revenue. This fact raises questions if service quality is necessary for retail outlets such as petrol stations in Malaysia, where the primary product is homogenous in an oligopolistic market.

### **1.3 Background of the problem**

Despite the known knowledge on the impact of service quality on various retail marketing concepts such as reputation and loyalty, the research on the area of study is still scarce. Service quality itself is still largely studied on Parasuraman et al. (1985) SERVQUAL and subsequently RATER dimensions. The impact of service quality on marketing concept/s is myriad, from purchase intention, reputation, image and loyalty. While past research have examined the dimensions of service quality and other marketing concepts, literature review revealed that these studies are primarily on the western context.

As retailers are constantly strategizing to remain robust, academic research on marketing retail is also in need of continuous knowledge. The academia lacks specific retail marketing theories because retail is multifaceted and convoluted within the spectrum of service and product (Teeroovengadum, 2020; Das, 2015; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Defeng Yang and Xinxin Wang, 2008). It would be helpful if specific retail service quality dimensions are ascertained and verified in new context. This is especially so when existing literature indicate that marketing approaches in the western context are not necessarily effective in Asian markets such as Malaysia (Mckinsey & Company, April 2021; Arditto et al. 2020).

Since retailers lack control over most of the products they sell, their primary competitive edge encircles the service they provide. The retail industry has revolutionised into various forms which includes self-service terminals, online retail and drive-through, for which service quality is crucial but have yet to gain much

academic attention. Service quality management provides pertinent insights on quality dimensions to enhance satisfaction and help provide superior quality of service that leads to customer loyalty and achieve customer-based brand equity (Colicev, Malshe and Pauwels, 2018; Kadampully et al., 2013).

Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) constitutes reputation and goodwill that is difficult to measure but it is a valuable measure for customer (Zarantonello et al., 2020; Tasci, 2020; Ambler, 2000; Aaker, 1991). The academic and management research on CBBE on services is scarce and inconclusive (Cambra-

Fierro et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2004). Studies conceptualizing CBBE dimensions prove to be diverse with perceived quality being one of its critical dimensions (Tasci, 2021; Hyeon Mo Jeon and Se Ran Yoo, 2021; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). Though perceived service quality is commonly known as a component of CBBE, there is a scarce number of literature published on the relationship between perceived retail service quality and CBBE (Zarantonello et al., 2020; Calvo-Porrall et al., 2015; Helgesen, et al., 2010).

There is a constant call for research on CBBE concepts and its relationships with a vast number of business outcomes. Tasci (2020) found that CBBE components can be summarized/categorized into 5 components: brand awareness/familiarity, brand image/brand association, perceived quality, consumer value and brand loyalty. These are defined in total from the perspective of consumer/customer on the meaningfulness of the brand. Some studies state that customer's purchase of services is based on trust (Attri et al., 2011; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Arora and Stoner, 1996).

Past studies find petrol retailers differentiating themselves by strongly positioning themselves using service and image (Onuoha, and Doris, 2017; Nguyen,

2013; Attri et al., 2011; Helgesen et al., 2010). The strong positioning of a brand tends to induce positive attitude that eventually impact trust and subsequently brand equity (Dai and Chen, 2017; Bhattacharya, 1997). The complexity and complexity and misinformation about brand equity has led to academic studies relating to customer's perception as such the notion that customers are the real contributors to the equity of an organisation (Keller 2016). Customer perception and behavior change are quite frequent and hence, CBBE that is defined as customers' response in relation to a myriad of marketing activities need further and continuous investigation (Keller, 2016; Takahashi, 2014; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000).

Albeit, the constructs: perceived retail service quality, brand image, brand attitude and CBBE have been researched, there is a dearth in empirical study on the possible relationships. As deliberated in Chapter 2, the components of CBBE begins with brand salience, leading to image building and performance, building feelings and judgment, finally reaching brand equity's position (resonance). Thus, a brand could build on its salience using its service quality, allowing it to build image, customers recognizing the brand for its quality service and moving on to construct a feeling of comfort, belief and trust the brand. These continuity has hardly been researched and in particular in a retail industry such as petrol station in Malaysia.

Therefore, in the current research, retail service quality (RSQ) dimensions that contribute to chain store image and store image needs to be investigated. The relationships between the image formed and feelings or attitude that allows the brand to reach resonance also need a clear direction, particularly in petrol stations in Klang

Valley. The current study seeks to close these gaps found in literature on RSQ and CBBE by examining the relationships between RSQ dimensions and CBBE