



**INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED INNOVATIVENESS, CUSTOMER PERCEIVED  
VALUES AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS CUSTOMER VALUE CO-CREATION  
BEHAVIOUR IN DESSERT CAFÉS**

**By**

**ESTHER LING SII WEI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Science**

**January 2023**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**January 2023**

**Chair : Chua Bee Lia, PhD**  
**Faculty : Food Science and Technology**

Dessert cafés are becoming increasingly popular as people embrace the new trend of enjoying after-meal treats. Dessert café owners and managers have been searching for ways of gaining a competitive differentiation to thrive in the fierce competition brought on by rival local shops and well-established international dessert chains. The present study highlights customer perceived innovativeness and its influence on customer perceived values, attitudes, and value co-creation, which can lead to unique experiences that meet customer needs and preferences and provide a competitive advantage. By understanding the mechanism of the customer value co-creation process, dessert café practitioners can gain insight into customer perceptions and encourage more value co-creation activities. Building on the value-attitude-behaviour model, service-dominant logic, and equity theory, the interrelationships of customer perceived innovativeness, three-dimensional customer perceived value, customer attitude, and customer value co-creation behaviour were investigated. This study determined the contribution of first-order innovativeness dimensions, namely menu, technology-based service, experiential, and promotional, to the second-order customer perceived innovativeness construct. Moreover, the mediating effects of perceived values and attitude on the relationship between perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour were examined. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed online to dessert café customers who have visited and are familiar with one of Malaysia's twelve dessert café brands. A total of 378 valid responses were used for data analysis. By using the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, the findings revealed that menu innovativeness is the highest contributor to the second-order customer perceived innovativeness, followed by experiential innovativeness. The findings demonstrated that customer perceived innovativeness was significantly related to perceived values, attitude, and value co-creation behaviour. In addition, functional value acted as a complementary mediator between perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour.

Attitude complementarily mediated customer perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour, and fully mediated between emotional value and value co-creation behaviour. Finally, emotional value and attitude worked as a serial mediator between perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour. This study advanced theoretical knowledge on the significant role of perceived innovativeness in increasing perceived values, inducing a positive attitude, and eventually intensifying value co-creation behaviour. The findings provide guidance to dessert café practitioners for improving their innovativeness, emphasizing emotional value and attitude, which can enhance customers' willingness to co-create value.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PENGARUH PERSEPSI DAYA PEMBAHARUAN, PERSEPSI NILAI DAN  
SIKAP PELANGGAN TERHADAP GELAGAT PENCIPTAAN NILAI  
BERSAMA PELANGGAN DI KAFE PENCUCI MULUT**

Oleh

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Kafe pencuci mulut semakin popular di Malaysia semenjak tumbuhnya budaya di mana orang ramai suka mencari pencuci mulut selepas makan. Pemilik dan pengurus kafe pencuci mulut mencari cara untuk memperoleh pembezaan kompetitif dan berkembang maju dalam persaingan sengit di kalangan kedai tempatan dan rangkaian antarabangsa. Kajian ini menekankan pada persepsi inovasi pelanggan dan pengaruhnya terhadap persepsi nilai pelanggan, sikap pelanggan, dan penciptaan nilai bersama yang membawa kepada pengalaman unik yang memenuhi keperluan dan keutamaan pelanggan dan memberikan kelebihan bersaing di pasaran. Dengan memahami mekanisme proses penciptaan bersama nilai pelanggan, pemilik kafe pencuci mulut boleh mendapatkan input tentang persepsi pelanggan dan menggalakkan lebih banyak aktiviti penciptaan nilai bersama. Berdasarkan model nilai-sikap-tingkah laku, teori *service dominant logic*, dan teori ekuiti, hubungan di antara persepsi inovatif pelanggan, persepsi nilai dalam tiga dimensi, sikap pelanggan dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama telah disiasat. Kajian ini juga menentukan sumbangan dimensi inovatif urutan pertama, iaitu menu, perkhidmatan berasaskan teknologi, eksperimental, dan promosi kepada konstruk persepsi inovasi pelanggan urutan kedua. Selain itu, kesan pengantaraan persepsi nilai dan sikap terhadap hubungan antara persepsi inovasi pelanggan dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama juga telah dikaji. Soal selidik telah diedarkan dalam talian kepada pelanggan kafe pencuci mulut yang telah melawat dan biasa dengan salah satu daripada dua belas jenama kafe pencuci mulut di Malaysia. 378 borang soal selidik telah diterima dan digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Dengan menggunakan teknik *partial least squares structural equation modeling* (PLS-SEM), hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa inovasi menu ialah sumbangan tertinggi kepada konstruk persepsi inovasi pelanggan

urutan kedua dan diikuti oleh inovasi eksperimental. Hasil kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa persepsi inovatif pelanggan mempunyai kaitan yang signifikan dengan persepsi nilai, sikap dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama pelanggan. Di samping itu, nilai fungsian bertindak sebagai pengantara pelengkap di antara persepsi inovasi pelanggan dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama. Sikap pelanggan didapati menjadi pengantara separa terhadap hubungan antara persepsi pelanggan tentang inovasi dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama, dan sebagai pengantara pelengkap antara nilai emosi dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama. Akhirnya, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa nilai emosi dan sikap berfungsi sebagai pengantara bersiri di antara persepsi inovasi dan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada teori berkaitan peranan persepsi inovasi dalam meningkatkan persepsi nilai, mendorong sikap positif, dan akhirnya mempergiatkan tingkah laku penciptaan nilai bersama. Hasil kajian ini juga membimbing pengurus kafe pencuci mulut dalam meningkatkan daya inovasi, dengan penekanan pada nilai emosi dan sikap, yang seterusnya akan meningkatkan keinginan pelanggan untuk mencipta nilai bersama dengan kafe pencuci mulut.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATT	Attitude
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling
CCB	Customer Citizenship Behaviour
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CMV	Common Method Variance
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPB	Customer Participation Behaviour
CPI	Customer Perceived Innovativeness
CVCCB	Customer Value Co-Creation Behaviour
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EI	Experiential Innovativeness
EV	Emotional Value
FV	Functional Value
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
LM	Linear Model
MAE	Mean Absolute Error
MAPE	Mean Absolute Percentage Error
MCO	Movement Control Order
MI	Menu Innovativeness
PI	Promotional Innovativeness
PLS - LM	Partial Least Squares minus Linear Model
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
QR	Quick Response

RM	Ringgit Malaysia
RMSE	Root Mean Square Error
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDL	Service-Dominant Logic
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SV	Social Value
TI	Technology-based service Innovativeness
UN	United Nations
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
VAB	Value-Attitude-Behaviour
VB-SEM	Variance-based Structural Equation Modeling
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The chapter briefly explains the dessert café industry in Malaysia and the complications faced in the current era. The research gaps overlooked by previous research are identified and explained in the problem statement section. Research objectives are decided to study the constructs' interrelationship, while the study's significance explains and discusses its positive influence and knowledge in the research field. The chapter also considers the operational definitions of the concepts and constructs used.

### 1.2 Research Background

The knowledge of consumer behaviour in the foodservice industry has never been more meaningful in overcoming the stiff competition and ever-changing customer demand. According to the survey done by Oppotus (2020), Malaysians eat out an average of 15 times (15.47) in a month, with millennials recording the highest frequency among the other age groups, a total of 17 times (16.91). The survey additionally disclosed that, on average, 85% of Malaysian eat out at least once a week, while 25% of Klang Valley residents dine out daily. These findings revealed that dining out is prevalent among Malaysians, particularly in more developed cities. Since people love to dine out, researchers urged to understand the factors that could affect the customer's decision to dine in a restaurant. Thus, extensive studies have demonstrated how the dining experience in a restaurant or café would affect the customer's behavioural intention—to revisit or recommend it to others (Hussein, 2018; Jin et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Sukhu & Bilgihan, 2021; Tsaur & Lo, 2020).

Modern consumers have different values and lifestyles, causing the foodservice market to become more diverse to meet the demands of each influential group. Researchers have become increasingly interested in the different segments of foodservice's dining experience elements, such as menu items, service quality, and physical atmosphere, which are critical for retaining consumers and ensuring long-term viability (H. Han & Sean, 2017; S.-M. Lee et al., 2022; P. Liu et al., 2018; Rozekhi et al., 2016; Slack et al., 2021). To deliver a better dining experience, the foodservice business has moved its focus to cafés, restaurants, and bars with a welcoming atmosphere, high technology service, and attractive interiors (Chad, 2022; Ong, 2022). Coffee shops, tea houses, and cafés are on the rise, and these establishments have been dubbed the "third place" between home and workplace because they provide a friendly setting for individuals to interact, work, read, and socialise (Smith, 2021). Malaysia's café industry is blooming and providing a wide range of food and beverage menus, such as

coffee, tea, desserts, and pastries (Flanders Investment & Trade, 2020). In Malaysia, the café movement began with franchise coffee shops providing quality coffee beans and light treats like cookies, muffins, and cakes. (D. Cheah, 2021). Later, brunch cafés grew in popularity when they began to serve brunch, a late-morning meal that replaced breakfast and lunch (Anuar, 2021; Ong, 2021).

Nowadays, dessert cafés are becoming increasingly popular among millennials, who visit the café for social gatherings and relaxation, making it a new type of foodservice provider (B. K. Cho et al., 2020). A dessert café or dessert shop refers to a café that provides dessert as its main menu, for example, ice cream, waffles, soufflé, chocolate and others (J.-S. Han & Yang, 2017; Jeon, 2017). They offer specialised desserts and a pleasant atmosphere, creating a private space for unwinding, relaxing, enjoying, and socialising. Before the dessert café became popular in Malaysia, small kiosks or roadside stalls selling local delicacies or desserts were more prevalent (Lum & Rosehaizat, 2017) or found in a restaurant rather than in a dessert-only café. Then, western international franchise ice cream chains like Baskin-Robbins and Haagen-Dazs, as well as Asian franchise dessert businesses such as Hui Lau Shan, entered the Malaysian dessert market (Fortune, 2021; Vkeong, 2012). They have multiple stores in malls and have demonstrated the feasibility of building a foodservice brand that only serves dessert. Aside from that, local franchise companies, including I Love Yoo!, Nelson's, and Roti Boy, have been established (MFA, n.d.; Tang, 2019). However, these franchises are typically operated in a kiosk with limited seating, providing customers with a less-than-ideal dining experience. Later, Korean and Japanese dessert cafés became popular, particularly matcha-based, *bingso*, and *kakigori* (Open Rice, 2017; Yong, n.d.). For example, Hanbing Korean Dessert Café, which serves *bingso* and street foods (Fong, 2015), has three outlets in Klang Valley.

Therefore, dessert café culture became a trend because of the Western-style diet (S. Y. Cho & Jun, 2016) and the Asian-style snacks, which the market continues to spread to Malaysia. As strong foreign franchise cafés join the Malaysian market, they stimulate customer interest in trying luxury and premium desserts and pique local entrepreneurs' curiosity and desire to launch their brand of dessert speciality cafés. Local dessert café entrepreneurs started researching customer demands to operate a trendy dessert café that attracts people to visit. In recent years, the dessert cafés have started to expand in Malaysia, where the founders of the Malaysia dessert café brand are being inspired predominantly by dessert shops in other countries, such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Europe. The most popular Malaysian dessert café brand, "Mykōri dessert café", sells Japanese-style *Kakigori* shaved ice desserts in Malaysia, with 115 outlets operating over Malaysia until June 2022 (MyKori Dessert Cafe, n.d.).

The foodservice sector strives to produce persistent, inclusive, and viable economic benefits while complying with a sustainable business philosophy that contributes to the local economy's growth. Statistics on Malaysia's service sector showed that the food and beverage subsector had grown consistently from 2012 to 2019 regarding gross output, total revenue, number of employees, and

salaries and wages (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022d). Notably, this subsector achieved a great value of gross output in 2019: RM 104 billion compared to RM 66 billion in 2015 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022b). The Consumer Price Index (CPI) data also revealed that the expenditure in restaurants and cafés increased yearly from 2010 to 2021 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022c). Dessert cafés, which are part of the food and beverage service industry, are the subject of the current study. They have rapidly increased in the Klang Valley due to changing trends among young people seeking after-meal desserts. Dessert cafés are becoming popular, which could benefit the food and beverage industry in terms of economic development and job creation.

Accordingly, there is an increase in work opportunities with the increasing number of dessert café operations. Society would wish for the service industry to grow as a large segment of human resources is involved, especially during the economic recovery post-pandemic (United Nation, 2021a). Sustainable Development Goal 8: “Decent work and economic growth” is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aimed to promote sustained, inclusive, and long-term economic growth with productive employment and decent work for all. Moreover, SDG Goal 9 plans to foster innovation by enhancing scientific research, promoting modernisation, and increasing the number of research and development jobs (United Nation, 2021b). Both SDGs aim to promote development-oriented strategies that support job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation research with technology and encourage micro- and small-sized enterprises. Diversification and modernised technology combined with innovation is crucial for economic productivity. The UN intends to promote policies to support employment, grow SMEs, and foster economic value through their value chain. In addition, Malaysia’s national entrepreneurship policy 2030 aimed to create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem and designed six strategic thrusts for entrepreneurship development to make Malaysia an entrepreneurial nation by 2030 (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2019). In the fourth strategic thrust, firm innovation efforts were emphasised to stimulate economic growth. Collaboration between entrepreneurs, innovators, and researchers in the company's establishment should be promoted as the offerings of products and services can be value-added through an innovation process and gain an advantage in the competitive market. The national policy encourages more market-friendly, innovative academic research in each industry to support business development.

Nevertheless, as the dessert café market blossoms, it confronts severe rivalry in Malaysia, especially in urban regions such as Klang Valley. Many comparable dessert café businesses have emerged, increasing competition in the industry. When the market becomes more competitive and experiences rapid change, it becomes more difficult for businesses to survive (Sun & Lee, 2021). As a result, more cafés and dessert shops closed, possibly due to their inability to recoup their losses despite having survived the pandemic (Sabrina, 2023). For example, the ice cream brand Softsrve, the beverage shop Smooshie Juice, and the cake shop Dew all called for a quit from the market. Therefore, café companies should adapt and innovate to stay afloat in fierce competition. Practitioners should



implement strategic actions ahead of rivals, actively respond to competitors' moves, and conduct comprehensive market research to ensure they keep up with customer demands to gain sustained competitive differentiation (Sun & Lee, 2021). In addition, continuous innovation is essential in the hospitality industry to satisfy changeable consumer demand and respond to customers' and marketers' needs to achieve a win-win situation by gaining customer satisfaction and improving operational performance (S. F. Chou et al., 2020). A highly innovative firm maintains strong competitiveness and has sufficient adaptive capability in rapidly changing environments.

Previous research has verified that innovative characteristics substantially impact restaurants' financial success and competitive advantage (Hallak et al., 2018; C. Lee et al., 2016b); thus, innovative offerings are critical in distinguishing each firm (Loh, 2022). Implementing new products, services, and promotions through innovation processes could cause market shifts, increase barriers to imitation, gain a competitive edge, and establish long-term sustainability (C. Lee et al., 2019, 2022; Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005). New consumer segments may draw attention to the innovative foodservice firm's product, service, and marketing campaigns. Meanwhile, the unique offerings of the dessert café provide added value and may induce a favourable attitude towards the firm. In addition, innovative service providers can improve communication with the customer and their involvement in value co-creation (Yen et al., 2020). Value co-creation highlights that "customers take an active role" in the business product-service exchange, providing valuable information and knowledge from the consumer perspective (Ranjan & Read, 2016). The dynamic interaction of customers with the firm may create a unique and unforgettable encounter with the customers, resulting in a personalised service experience and leading to business success (Hollebeek & Andreassen, 2018).

Therefore, the current study examines the customer perceptions of innovative characteristics in the dessert café industry in Malaysia and their impact on perceived values, attitudes towards the dessert café, and customers' intentions to co-create value with the firm. A highly innovative firm is predicted to stimulate customers to co-create values through the mediating effect of perceived values and attitudes. In the context of a dessert café, the direct and indirect effects of the relationship between second-order perceived innovativeness and third-order customer value co-creation behaviour can be investigated.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The foodservice industry faced fierce competition with the availability of various alternatives and changing customer consumption patterns (Chua et al., 2020). Foodservice firms have a high failure rate (Posist, 2021), with a slim profit margin where high costs are needed for employee wages and purchase expenses (R. Crawford, 2019). A survey of 232 coffee shop owners in the United States indicated that 50% - 74% of independent coffee shops failed in the first five years (Lindenberg, 2019; Mishra, 2019). The data showed the high failure rate of an

independent shop. If an individual brand does not identify itself to thrive in the market, there is a considerable chance of failing to catch customers' attention (Verdict Food Service, 2021). Sustainability and competitive advantage are common issues in the hospitality industry (Tommasetti et al., 2018). Failure to differentiate oneself from the market, inability to manage rapid growth or changes and lack of experience changing in economics up-down are all factors that affect the sustainability of a foodservice operation (Clauss et al., 2019). The situation deteriorated when the world was struck by a rare tragedy, a coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in a tragically enormous number of human deaths and the world's most significant economic recession in 2020 (Gopinath, 2020; Hashim et al., 2021). Compared to the year before the pandemic in 2019, the annual revenue of the food and beverage service subsector in 2021 was 29.5 points lower (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022a). By implementing social distancing and restricted operation hours, over 2,000 coffee shops and *mamak* eateries in Malaysia were reported to be permanently shuttered since the implementation of the MCO in March (Hassandarvish, 2020). Some food and beverage businesses were shut down, such as dal.komm coffee, Ben & Jerry's, Delicious Group, and WhupWhup café (F. Lee, 2021).

In Malaysia, local dessert café firms confront intense competition with the growth of rivalry dessert shops (J. Tan, 2021) and well-established international dessert chains (Wong, 2018). Additionally, dessert cafés struggled to survive as sales dropped (J. Lee, 2020), resulting in an inability to bear the rising costs and no longer being profitable (McManus, 2023). For example, Softsrve, a local ice cream brand, was bought over by other entrepreneurs because it was unprepared for the abrupt changes during the pandemic and was eventually unable to sustain itself (J. Lee, 2020). Then, the new entrepreneurs moved the location of the dessert shop from a highly competitive location (i.e., Damansara Uptown and Sri Petaling) to a less competitive yet potential area in Sea Park, Petaling Jaya. Dew, a local cake shop, closed down after five years of operations because it could not cope with the losses (Sabrina, 2023) and compete with rivals such as Jaslyn Cakes, Bisou Bake Shop, Tedboy, and Australian bakery within a 1 km radius. Indeed, the local dessert brand faced intense competition with its rivals as the imitators quickly adapted and copied a successful business. A further instance is the soybean milk dessert industry, which faced intense competition between several local brands, including Dáo, The Soybean Factory, SoyLab, Bean Jr, TONO Soy Milk, Soyya (J. Tan, 2021). In the meantime, local ice cream brands such as Inside Scoop, Crème De La Crème, and Piccoli Lotti faced competition with international brands like Baskin Robbins and Häagen-Dazs (F. Lee, 2021). In a highly competitive environment, customers disperse among different dessert brands and are attracted to the one that meets their needs and demands. When consumers are drawn to one brand of dessert, the competition causes the competing brand to disappear from the market gradually. Local dessert café brands find it hard to sustain, probably due to the failure to adapt to the competitive environment and attract new customers while retaining the existing ones. As a result, academic researchers and practitioners are urged to comprehend the factor in achieving long-term sustainability and competitive advantage.



Nevertheless, there is a lack of academic research on the dessert café industry. Dessert café gained rare attention compared to other foodservice operations such as casual restaurants, fine-dining restaurants, upscale café, and ethnic restaurants (A. Chen & Peng, 2018; Hwang et al., 2020; D. Kim & Jang, 2017; C. Lee et al., 2016a; Rafdinal & Suhartanto, 2020). Dessert café has a different market niche in the foodservice industry because they do not serve complete meals; instead, they focus on offering high-quality desserts and unique experiences. Cafés offer a more open, relaxed, and independent setting than restaurants, whose layout is planned with several seating arrangements for gatherings or photo spots (Comoncy, n.d.). Thus, people may expect more from a dessert café establishment regarding dessert quality, ambience, and service. Due to its perception as a luxury experience rather than a typical dining out, dessert cafés' sustainability issue may be more severe than it is compared to the well-researched casual restaurant market. Customers of dessert cafés may therefore have different values than those of other foodservice segments, and as a result, they may act differently due to their demands. Moreover, consumer behaviour research in the context of dessert cafés is mainly undertaken in countries with a more established dessert café sector (e.g., Korea) (Hur et al., 2020; H.-C. Kim, 2019). Malaysia has less documented information regarding dessert cafés, making it difficult to interpret the local customers' behaviour. Local entrepreneurs have a limited scholarly understanding of the Malaysian consumer market for dessert cafés. Customers' desires and preferences must be reviewed for dessert café owners to provide better products and services. It is critical for dessert café practitioners and academic researchers to comprehend what customers believe about dessert café visits and whether these value perceptions directly predict customers' behaviour. Thus, local dessert café brands are selected as the context of the current study.

Despite the prominence of innovation and value co-creation as a competitive advantage, studies on the customer perceptions of innovativeness and intention to co-create value in the dessert café context are scarce. Accordingly, consumer behaviour research in the context of dessert cafés can significantly benefit the industry, fill in gaps in academic literature, and provide customers' perspectives. Gaining a competitive advantage within an industry is challenging as rivalry closely observes every successful strategy and copies them immediately. Entrepreneurs are forced to improve their product offerings and service at a fast pace to gain customers in the turbulent foodservice industry, particularly during the post-pandemic era. A firm has a long-built image while constantly searching for improvement in delivering products and services via creativity and innovations (Hallak et al., 2018). According to Healy and Iomaire (2019), the critical success factors of the foodservice industry were suggested as long-term planning, innovations and adaptation of new strategies as the situation changes. The firm should innovate customer journeys to adapt to new telecommunication channels and demands (MacDonald, 2022). Innovation activities are the income-generating opportunities in gaining competitive advantage of a dessert café, while sustainability highly depends on the customer's post-consumption behaviour. However, there has been minimal discussion about the dessert cafés' innovativeness in contrast to fundamental quality attributes such as food quality, service quality and atmospheric quality as the primary study focus (Cho et al., 2020; Jeon, 2017; H.-C. Kim, 2019). The innovative approach is the critical

customer loyalty strategy by consistently providing new and creative ideas on the menu, product offerings, technologies, and promotion (E. Kim et al., 2018). Little empirical studies have looked at these dimensions contributing to customer perceived innovativeness. Investigating how these innovative characteristics could influence consumer values and engagement in value co-creation is critical. The previous work of E. Kim et al. (2019) demonstrated that an innovative restaurant image positively affects customer behavioural intention. They further explain that the extent to which a restaurant is perceived as innovative directly influences customer satisfaction and their intention to recommend it to others. Hence, innovation activity is a crucial factor for the sustainable operation of the foodservice industry; even so, there was limited research on innovation activities in dessert cafés. The present study could provide customer perceptions of the dessert café's innovativeness, which could significantly influence customer behaviour.

Therefore, customer viewpoints on the areas to be improved are required to provide satisfactory product and service delivery (Albertsen et al., 2020). Extensive studies focused on customer behaviour from a psychological standpoint or decision-making processes, making the consumer a passive participant in the foodservice company's value exchange process (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018; Rozekhi et al., 2016; H. Wu, 2013). Recently, the concept of the customer as an active partner rather than a passive response has garnered considerable attention in the service industry (Assiouras et al., 2019; Font et al., 2021; Min et al., 2021; H. Zhang et al., 2020). The value co-creation notion highlights the value exchange between the customer and the business company, in which the customer may provide the firm with helpful information and knowledge about consumer-centric insights, allowing the firm to understand their needs and demands better (Payne et al., 2008). In the current study, the value co-creation concept is incorporated since dessert café environments comprise the most outstanding aspects of the service business, such as the mutual interactions between customers and employees and the co-producer role of customers (Q. X. Tran et al., 2020). Interactions between customers (customer-customer) and between customers and employees (customer-employee) can generate value co-creation behaviour within the company. Academic researchers and practitioners acknowledge the need to identify the antecedents and consequences of customer value co-creation behaviour, allowing for the foodservice marketing strategy development to improve customer behaviour for value creation formation (E. Kim et al., 2019).

Furthermore, customer perceived value and attitude construct were not taken into account in previous studies when attempting to link the relationship between innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour, which is based on a relationship that has been verified. The present study fills the literature gap by investigating the mechanism by which perceived innovativeness could significantly improve value co-creation behaviour through the mediating effect of perceived values and attitude. Perceived value, a multidimensional variable, can be used to examine customer perceptions of the innovation effort that a firm provides. Ra (2017) stated that the menu features significantly influence the experience value of dessert cafés. At the same time, customer perceived value

was revealed to be a mediator between quality attributes and customer loyalty in the hotel industry (Hussein et al., 2018). In recent studies, researchers showed a significant relationship between innovation-related perceptions towards customer perceived value (Albertsen et al., 2020; F. Zhang et al., 2020). For example, Alberson et al. (2020) showed a significant impact of innovation-related perceptions on customer perceived value in the food manufacturing sector. These studies confirmed the significant role of perceived value as a variable and mediator in a conceptual framework.

Then, past research underestimated attitude constructs, in which customer attitude acts as a mediating role between value and behaviour. In the literature gap, customer attitude can be assumed to influence value co-creation behaviour through perceived values and innovativeness. In addition, the previous work of E. Kim et al. (2018) recommended attitude as an outcome variable in measuring the effect of customer perceived innovativeness. While attitude is the antecedent variable of behaviour, it reinforces the cognitive value and displays a customer's negativity and positivity beliefs towards an object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Recently, scholars studied the hierarchy relationship of value, attitude and behaviour in healthy food and beverage purchase (H. P. Chang et al., 2020; M. Cheung & To, 2019) and incorporated attitude as a mediator in studying restaurant intention and performance (K. N. Liu et al., 2020; Popy & Bappy, 2020). They highlighted the importance of attitude in marketing research and indicated attitude's mediator role. They further explained that attitude should guide the consumers' behaviour relative to the involvement and motivation in purchasing a product and service. Thus, a positive attitude is believed to stimulate customer participation and engagement in value co-creation generated by high levels of perceived value. Customer attitude should lead to value co-creation behaviour that proposes a linear relationship: customers having a positive attitude towards dessert café are more willing to co-create.

Researchers have recently become increasingly interested in serial or multiple mediation models (Ghazali et al., 2022; Satici et al., 2020). Serial mediation is a type of mediation in which the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is transmitted through a series of mediator variables. In other words, the independent variable affects the first mediator, which affects the second mediator, and so on, until the dependent variable is reached. The serial mediation model is essential to measure a causal chain link of the mediators and determine a specified pathway. The framework could identify the intermediate variable that significantly impacts the dependent variable from the independent variable. Accordingly, this study highlights the role of perceived values and attitudes in mediating the relationship between perceived value and value co-creation behaviour, which was not included in previous research on the value co-creation concept. Taken together, the serial mediation model consisting of the constructs of perceived dessert café innovativeness, perceived value, attitude, and value co-creation behaviour will be highlighted in this study. The current study covers a knowledge gap in the context of dessert cafés by analysing the serial mediating effect of multiple dimensions of perceived value and customer attitude that were not included in earlier studies.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

This research incorporates four constructs: perceived innovativeness, customer perceived value, attitude, and customer value co-creation behaviour, which aims to investigate the mechanism through which perceived innovativeness explains value co-creation behaviour in dessert cafés by adopting the integrated conceptual framework.

1. To determine the contributions of four innovativeness dimensions: menu, technology-based service, experiential, and promotional, to the customer perceived innovativeness of dessert cafés.
2. To investigate the interrelationship between customer perceived innovativeness, customer perceived value (i.e., functional, emotional, social), attitude and customer value co-creation behaviour (i.e., participation, citizenship) in the dessert café.
3. To examine the serial mediating role of customer perceived value aspects and attitude in the relationship between customer perceived innovativeness and customer value co-creation behaviour in the dessert café.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the contributions of the menu, technology-based service, experiential, and promotional innovativeness to the customer's perception of dessert café innovation?
2. What is the relationship between customer perceived innovativeness, customer perceived value, attitude, and customer value co-creation behaviour in dessert cafés?
3. Do customer perceived value and attitude significantly mediate the relationship between customer perceived innovativeness and customer value co-creation behaviour?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

### **1.6.1 Theoretical significance**

Expected research outcomes contribute to the current body of knowledge, such as substituting perceived innovativeness for fundamental quality attributes in the conceptual framework, which increases the novelty of the studies within the dessert café context. The current research expands the knowledge of E. Kim et al. (2018), who developed and validated the scale of customer perceived innovativeness. The multidimensional variable of customer perceived



innovativeness is adapted in this study, especially in the way the contribution of each dimension in the context of the dessert café is measured. The findings could add knowledge to the existing literature on innovativeness, specifically in dessert cafés' menus, technology-based service, experiential, and promotional dimensions.

The present study adds to the existing body of knowledge in the value-attitude-behaviour (VAB) model and expands the framework of H. P. Chang et al.'s (2020) work by integrating customer perceived innovativeness as the antecedent to customer value. The integration is linked by equity theory, where innovativeness is viewed as the input of what the dessert café offers and perceived values act as the output of what the customer perceives. Then, this study contributes new knowledge to the VAB model for examining three customer value dimensions to capture the specific hierarchy pathway of value co-creation. Functional, emotional, and social values are examined explicitly in the serial mediation framework, in which the influence of each value aspect on the outcome variables can be investigated. This work is a reference for students and educators to further research in the same field, which assembles service marketing literature in the hospitality and foodservice industries.

In addition, the research extended the framework of E. Kim et al. (2019) by integrating mediators in the well-verified significant relationship between perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour (Clauss et al., 2019; Yen et al., 2020). The current study provides a new conceptual framework with integrated theories to investigate the mechanism by which perceived innovativeness could explain the value co-creation process. The integrated conceptual model examines the mediating effect of perceived values and attitudes in the relationship between perceived innovativeness and value co-creation behaviour. The new framework shows how value co-creation could happen when perceived innovativeness, values, and attitude are considered. This study gives rise to the accumulated research that explains the value co-creation concept and links them to the actual behavioural phenomena in the dessert café visit experience (E. Kim et al., 2016). Results could provide the innovative foundation for future hospitality management and service marketing research by testing customer perceived innovativeness measurement scales and conceptualising the value co-creation process through perceived value and attitude.

The concept of value co-creation is gaining interest in the hospitality industry and intends to develop an empirical measurement approach for customer relationships and interactions (Saha et al., 2022). The results of a comprehensive study on innovation and customer value co-creation behaviour are inconsistent and have blossomed in various directions (Ranjan & Read, 2016). Professional educators and business leaders alike are less knowledgeable about the effects of perceived innovation and the co-creation of values due to the complexity of these interrelationships. The current study findings fill the research gaps and enrich the literature by examining customer value co-creation behaviour. Motivated by the variables extracted from the

previous literature (M. Cheung & To, 2019; E. Kim et al., 2019; K.-W. Kwon et al., 2017), the integrated conceptual framework is derived and adopted within the context of a dessert café. The present study examines the core theoretical basis of the value co-creation process and anticipates providing considerable empirical evidence. In summary, this study foresees providing remarkable contributions in a theoretical review of a conceptual model that demonstrates the positive influence of dessert café innovativeness and portrays the importance of value co-creation, both of which are indispensable elements to bring recognition and differentiation to the competitive market.

### **1.6.2 Managerial significance**

This research is valuable in assisting dessert café practitioners to effectively enhance product and service development. Assessing customers' behaviour during visits is vital for business sustainability and brand attachment (H. Y. Teng & Chen, 2021). From a practical approach, the research findings on customer perceptions of innovativeness facilitate the café owners in getting the measure of a practical innovation approach and to what extent the café fits in with value co-creation. This research analyses the most significant innovativeness dimension in the customer perceptions of dessert café innovation. The findings may help practitioners develop effective investment plans and innovation strategies.

Furthermore, this study highlights the active role of consumers in the value formation process by allowing more participation and engagement and eventually benefiting from the interactions between both parties. The current study assesses customer behaviour to engage in value co-creation activities such as providing feedback, maintaining interpersonal relationships with employees, and recommending to others. These inputs could provide valuable information for dessert café owners to work with and promote active involvement in value co-creation, thus gaining a competitive advantage and a higher probability of success. In addition, the present study brings insights into the mechanism of value co-creation from perceived innovativeness among dessert café customers by examining the mediators. Dessert café operators may focus on the significant mediation path that could guide the value co-creation process. The findings could lead practitioners to establish greater value-creation activities that encourage customers to participate through positive influences of innovativeness, values, and attitude. To summarise, this study anticipates providing valuable input to dessert café practitioners for gaining competitive differentiation and delivering reliable products and services.

## 1.7 Operational Definitions

**Menu Innovativeness:** Customers' perceptions of the newness and uniqueness of the menu items, including the dessert café's ability to provide new flavours, new food combinations, new and customised menu items, and innovative food presentations (E. Kim et al., 2018).

**Technology-Based Service Innovativeness:** Customers' judgement on integrating technology into a dessert café's service is based on the ability to offer new ordering apps, tools, and procedures and deliver cutting-edge services (E. Kim et al., 2018).

**Experiential Innovativeness:** Customers' assessment of the intangible items related to service innovativeness to the extent of how a dessert café creates a personalised experience for customers, specifically the employee interactions in innovative ways, creative problem solving, and innovative physical design and events (E. Kim et al., 2018).

**Promotional Innovativeness:** Customers' perspectives on a dessert café's marketing strategies for communicating with and convincing customers via promotion deals, a new marketing program, and suggestion platforms (E. Kim et al., 2018).

**Customer Perceived Innovativeness:** Customers' overall evaluation of the capability of a dessert café to practice creative ideas and solutions in terms of menu, technology-based service, experiential, and promotional (E. Kim et al., 2018).

**Customer Perceived Value:** Consumers' overall evaluations of the usefulness of a dessert café's product or service are based on their impressions of what is received and given in terms of functional, emotional, and social aspects (Zeithaml, 1988).

**Functional Value:** Customers' measurement of the extent to which the dessert café has the desired performance in terms of quality, value for money, and convenience (P.-T. Chen & Hu, 2010; W. Yang & Mattila, 2016).

**Emotional Value:** Customers' perceptions of the feelings or affective states they experience while visiting a dessert café (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

**Social Value:** Customers' assessment of the ability of a dessert café to enhance social identity and the social consequences of how the dessert café communicates to others (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

**Attitude:** Customers' disposition to respond positively or negatively towards the dessert café (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000).

**Customer value co-creation behaviour:** Customers' willingness to take an active role in co-creating value with the dessert café owner, employees, and other customers, for example, by participating in information sharing and seeking, displaying responsible behaviour, involving in personal interaction, and engaging in extra-role behaviours of feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerating (Y. Yi & Gong, 2013).

**Customer participation behaviour:** Customers' willingness to engage in the expected in-role behaviours that are necessary for a dessert café to deliver excellent products and services, such as sharing and seeking information, being cooperative, and having a good interpersonal relationship with the employees (Y. Yi & Gong, 2013).

**Customer citizenship behaviour:** Customers' willingness to engage in the initiative and extra-role behaviours that can provide noteworthy benefits to the dessert café, such as providing feedback, recommending to others, assisting dining companions, and tolerating minor service failure (Y. Yi & Gong, 2013).

## 1.8 Scope of study

In the setting of the dessert café, the study focuses primarily on the customer perceived innovativeness and its effect on value co-creation behaviour through the mediating effect of perceived values and attitude. The study is prompted by the problem of several dessert café business failures, which may be attributable to rivalry from rivals, imitators, and well-established multinational dessert chains. In an effort to achieve competitive advantage and sustainability, the dessert café industry sought input on customer behaviour, which led to an examination of customer perceptions of innovativeness, which the literature revealed to be a key predictor of value co-creation. To determine the value co-creation mechanism, the serial mediation model incorporates the mediators: perceived values and attitudes.

Customers of twelve dessert cafés, namely Bean Jr, Chewie Mellow, Crème De La Crème, Dáo, Inside scoop, Kakiyuki, Miru dessert café, Molten Chocolate Café, Mykōri dessert café, Piccoli Lotti, Snowflake, and The Soybean Factory, comprised the sample for this study. The survey responses were collected over two months, from August to September 2021. The limited time frame may restrict the study's scope; as time goes by, the dessert café trend may shift as time passes. The study employed quantitative research, with questionnaires as the



sole mode of collecting data and numerical data analysis. However, every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the study.

## 1.9 Organization of Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters that are structured as follows:

**Chapter one** introduces the research context and outlines the current challenges faced. It includes a problem statement, research objectives, and the study's significance.

**Chapter two** conducts a literature review of the study constructs and identifies gaps in the literature. Then, theories such as SDL theory, equity theory, and the value-attitude-behaviour model are integrated to build a conceptual framework. Hypotheses grounded in the theories are then developed.

**Chapter three** discusses the research methodology used in the study, including the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis technique, which is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

**Chapter four** presents the study findings, which include preliminary data analysis, descriptive analysis, measurement and structural model assessment, and mediation analysis. The chapter presents the data in tables and figures and provides an interpretation of the findings, answering the hypotheses and research questions.

**Chapter five** is the final chapter and serves as the conclusion and summary of the study findings. It outlines the theoretical and practical implications of the research and discusses the limitations and recommendations for future studies in this area.

## 1.10 Chapter Summary

The introduction begins with the background of the study, including the study's constructs and the context in which it is situated. Then, it is followed by the problem statement related to the topic and highlighting gaps from previous research. The research objectives are then presented, along with the research questions. The chapter also comprises a discussion of the significance of the study, explaining why the research is important and how it contributes to the field in practical and theoretical aspects. The last section of this chapter highlights the operationalized definitions of the constructs, scope of study, and thesis organization.

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