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SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT, BRAND IMAGE AND CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR: EVIDENCE FROM MALAYSIA'S CONTAINER FOOD COURTS

Aravinteran Pooventeran*, Shishi Kumar Piaralal, Nur Amalina Zulkefli, Santhi Raghavan, Gajehindran Yellangan Koval

Faculty of Business and Management, Open University Malaysia (OUM), Malaysia

*E-mail: aravin@oum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Container Food Courts, eco-friendly culinary spaces created from repurposed shipping containers, have emerged as a popular trend in Malaysia's urban areas, offering diverse gastronomic options within casual, open-air environments that appeal especially to digitally connected consumers. However, empirical evidence on the key factors shaping Customer Behaviour (CB) within this unique context remains limited. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study investigates the influence of Social Media Advertising Content (SMAC), Social Media Sales Promotion Content (SMSPC), and Brand Image (BI) on CB towards Container Food Courts in Malaysia. A structured online questionnaire was administered to 161 respondents with prior experience of visiting container food courts, and the data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The results reveal that SMAC, SMSPC, and BI significantly and positively influence CB, with BI identified as the strongest predictor. These findings highlight the critical role of brand value, visual identity, and promotional content in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions. The study advances the theoretical application of TPB by illustrating how its constructs operate in a digitally mediated, informal food service context. Practically, the results offer actionable insights for food court operators and marketers in creating targeted digital strategies to build trust, foster engagement, and drive customer loyalty. Additionally, the findings provide a foundation for policymakers to consider ethical and regulatory frameworks for social media marketing within the food and beverage sector. Overall, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital marketing and consumer behaviour in Malaysia's evolving urban dining landscape.

Keywords: *Consumer behaviour, social media marketing, advertising, sales promotion strategy, urban food culture, brand perception, TPB*

INTRODUCTION

Container Food Courts represent an emerging trend in the Malaysian food and beverage industry, characterised by the adaptive reuse of shipping containers to create vibrant, flexible, and cost-efficient dining spaces (Coorey et al., 2018; Fahlevi et al., 2019). These food courts typically host diverse culinary vendors in open-air or semi-enclosed environments, appealing to urban consumers seeking convenience, variety, and novel dining experiences (Sutia & Fahlevi, 2024). Their growing popularity is also attributed to their strategic locations in commercial and recreational areas, making them attractive to a broad customer base, including working professionals and younger demographics. In tandem with this rise, social media has become a dominant marketing and communication tool for food businesses. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook enable vendors to share visually engaging content, promote menu offerings, and interact directly with customers in real-time (Nedra et al., 2019; Blasco-López et al., 2019). In this context, social media serves as a promotional channel and a powerful influence on consumer attitudes and behaviour, especially in visually driven, lifestyle-oriented sectors like casual dining.

Despite the rising integration of social media marketing in the food service sector, empirical research investigating the direct influence of specific social media content on Customer Behaviour (CB) remains limited, especially within the context of Container Food Courts. While prior studies have emphasised the importance of visual content and peer influence in online food engagement (Blasco-López et al., 2019; Ghaleb & Piaralal, 2024; Sarita & Suleeman, 2017), few have focused on the distinct roles played by Social Media Advertising Content (SMAC) and Social Media Sales Promotion Content (SMSPC) in influencing consumer decisions in dynamic and informal dining environments. Moreover, the role of Brand Image (BI), as a cognitive and emotional impression shaped by marketing communications and digital brand presence, has been shown to affect customer trust, loyalty, and purchase intention (Matroji et al., 2023; Raji et al., 2019; Sutia et al., 2023). However, no comprehensive study to date has evaluated how SMAC, SMSPC, and BI simultaneously contribute to CB in Malaysia's Container Food Court ecosystem, leaving a gap in both academic understanding and strategic marketing application.

This study aims to investigate the role of social media marketing and brand image in shaping CB within the unique context of Container Food Courts in Malaysia. It seeks to address a critical gap in the literature, which has largely overlooked the interplay between SMAC, SMSPC, and BI in influencing consumer decision-making within informal and mobile dining environments. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study adopts a behavioural framework to examine how these digital marketing elements affect consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviours. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To ascertain the relationship between SMAC and CB among Malaysians towards Container Food Courts.
2. To identify the relationship between SMSPC and CB among Malaysians towards Container Food Courts.
3. To examine the relationship between BI and CB among Malaysians towards Container Food Courts.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to offer evidence-based insights that can inform strategic decisions for food vendors, marketers, and business developers. As Container Food Courts continue to gain popularity and evolve as lifestyle destinations, understanding the drivers of consumer engagement becomes essential. This study contributes to both academic discourse and practical applications by clarifying how targeted social media strategies and brand positioning can be leveraged to enhance customer attraction, satisfaction, and retention in Malaysia's dynamic food service sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB, developed by Ajzen (1985), provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how individual attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape behavioural intentions and actual behaviours. In the context of Malaysia's evolving urban food landscape, Container Food Courts present a contemporary setting and relevant context for examining CB through the lens of the TPB. Attitudes refer to individuals' evaluations of the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), such as beliefs about food quality, pricing, sustainability, and overall experience at Container Food Courts. These perceptions influence their intention to visit and engage with such establishments (Han et al., 2010). Subjective norms refer to social pressures or expectations from referent groups (Ajzen, 1991), like friends, family, and digital communities, which also play a significant role. With the rise of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content amplify social desirability, shaping consumer behaviour in favour of popular or trendy food venues (Chu & Kim, 2011; Yoon et al., 2020).

Perceived behavioural control refers to the ease or difficulty with which individuals believe they can perform a behaviour and is influenced by both internal factors and external conditions (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of Container Food Courts, elements such as strategic urban locations, online ordering systems, and cashless payment options enhance perceived control, making the dining experience more accessible and appealing (Kim & Ko, 2012). Moreover, digital marketing efforts, particularly SMAC and SMSPC, serve as significant external stimuli that interact with TPB components to influence consumer behaviour. Consumers often

evaluate these digital messages for authenticity and relevance, which shapes their attitudes and intentions (Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Therefore, TPB offers a comprehensive framework for predicting CB in the Container Food Court segment and informs practitioners about the key psychosocial factors to target in marketing strategies. Through TPB, this study aligns theoretical insights with empirical trends to better understand the drivers of consumer engagement in this emerging food retail format.

Customer Behaviour (CB)

CB represents a critical dimension in marketing research, referring to the psychological, emotional, and behavioural responses of consumers during the processes of searching for, purchasing, using, and evaluating products or services (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of Container Food Courts, CB encapsulates consumers' decisions influenced by digital engagement, promotional content, and brand perception. These behavioural patterns include decisions about where to dine, how frequently to visit, and how customers engage with food vendors, both offline and via digital platforms (Adila et al., 2020; Sahir et al., 2021). Scholars such as Raji et al. (2019) and Gan and Wang (2017) highlight how brand image, perceived value, and promotional stimuli directly influence these behaviours. Understanding CB in this niche but growing sector is essential for operators aiming to enhance customer acquisition and retention strategies, especially within the competitive dynamics of Malaysia's food service industry.

Moreover, CB serves as a strategic tool for food entrepreneurs to craft experiences that are aligned with consumer expectations. Market research on consumer preferences allows container food court operators to align menu offerings with emerging food trends, dietary needs, and cultural tastes (Martinez-Ruiz & Gómez-Cantó, 2016). For example, A container food court in business districts caters to busy professionals by offering diverse, quick-service dining options without compromising quality or taste (Carpenter II & Sweetland, 2023). Additionally, digital marketing initiatives tailored to social media behaviour, such as limited-time promotions, influencer partnerships, and brand storytelling, can foster stronger customer loyalty and expand the reach of the food court (Buil et al., 2013; Suleman et al., 2022).

Social Media Advertising Content (SMAC)

SMAC refers to brand-related promotional materials, such as images, videos, texts, and interactive elements, shared on social media platforms to engage consumers and shape their brand perceptions (Keller, 2009; Mabkhot & Piaralal, 2024; Straker et al., 2015). SMAC serves as a communication tool and a strategic marketing approach that can significantly influence consumer behaviour (Bruhn et al., 2012). High-quality emotional and informative content has boosted consumer trust, brand recall, and purchasing intention (Duffett, 2017). Visuals, aesthetics, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok create memorable brand impressions and foster consumer loyalty (Albarq et al., 2022; Ahmed & Zahid, 2014; Cheung et al., 2019). According to Yadav and Pathak (2017), consumer attitudes in social media marketing are shaped by digital ad quality, brand authenticity, and the perceived usefulness of content. Research by Boateng and Okoe (2015) and Keller and Lehmann (2006) emphasises that it is not the ad spending, but rather the creative quality and relevance of content, that directly impacts consumer responses. In the context of container food courts, SMAC helps enhance customer experiences through engaging visuals, authentic narratives, and localised promotions, making them more likely to visit, recommend, and repurchase. Thus, SMAC plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviour toward brands in a digitally-driven market (Wibowo et al., 2021; Sundararaj & Rejeesh, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between SMAC and CB.

Social Media Sales Promotion Content (SMSPC)

SMSPC refers to the strategic dissemination of promotional incentives, such as discounts, giveaways, and limited-time offers, via social media platforms to stimulate consumer interest, trial, and purchase behaviour (Straker et al., 2015; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). SMSPC integrates both monetary promotions (e.g., price discounts and coupons) and non-monetary promotions (e.g., free samples, contests, and exclusive events), each with distinct impacts on branding and CB (Buil et al., 2013; Chi, 2011). Prior studies highlight that well-executed social media promotions can significantly enhance customer engagement and

influence consumer behaviour by leveraging urgency, scarcity, and peer influence (Chandon et al., 2000; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Shen and Bissell (2013) demonstrated how cosmetic brands on Facebook used promotional messages like product trials and discount codes to drive traffic and sales. Additionally, campaigns that include loyalty rewards and influencer-endorsed incentives have proven effective in fostering positive customer attitudes and repeat visits, especially in price-sensitive markets like Malaysia (Hilman et al., 2017; Khamaludin et al., 2022). In the context of container food courts, SMSPC is particularly impactful as it taps into local consumer behaviour patterns, encouraging foot traffic through flash sales, exclusive promotions, and digital contests, thereby increasing brand awareness and customer loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between SMSPC and CB.

Brand Image (BI)

BI refers to the overall perception that consumers hold about a brand, shaped by both tangible and intangible elements (Albarq et al., 2022; Keller, 1993). It is the sum of a customer's beliefs, ideas, and impressions about a brand, often formed through repeated brand interactions and marketing communications (Bennett & Koudelova, 2000). According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), BI comprises physical features such as design and packaging, as well as abstract associations like emotions, beliefs, and symbolic meanings. Hoeffler and Keller (2003) posit that BI is formed from both product-related attributes and experiential benefits that evoke specific customer feelings and expectations. Aaker (1996) classified BI into functional and hedonic dimensions, suggesting that a well-crafted BI influences not only consumer attitudes but also purchase intentions. Numerous studies have confirmed the positive impact of BI on CB. For example, Keller (2009) and Faircloth et al. (2001) found that strong brand images lead to higher consumer trust, loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium. In the context of container food courts, BI is especially influential as it shapes perceptions of cleanliness, food quality, ambience, and vendor reputation (Fahlevi et al., 2019; Lu & Chen, 2017). When consumers associate these establishments with consistent quality and appealing aesthetics, their behavioural responses are positively reinforced. Considering the significance of BI on CB, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between BI and CB.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the proposed relationships between three independent variables: BI, SMAC, and SMSPC, and the dependent variable, CB. These variables are conceptualised to investigate how branding and promotional strategies delivered via social media platforms shape customer attitudes and behaviours, particularly within the context of Container Food Courts. The framework has been adapted from Sutia and Fahlevi (2024) and is presented in Figure 1.

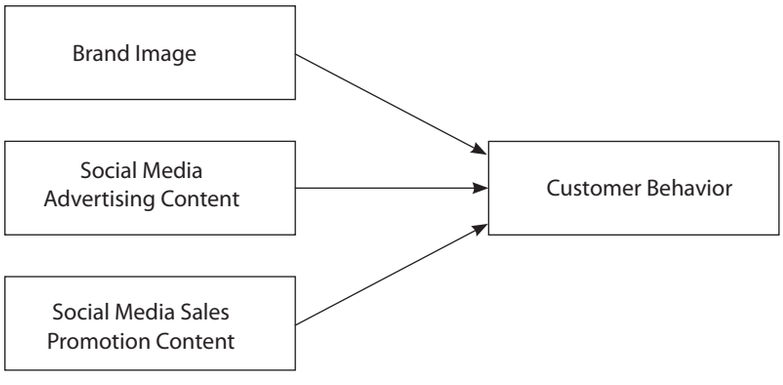

Figure 1 Conceptual framework
Note: Adapted from Sutia and Fahlevi (2024)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study's target population comprises Malaysian citizens who have experience dining at container food courts, innovative eateries developed from repurposed shipping containers. A quantitative research design was adopted to investigate the influence of social media content and brand image on CB. To ensure that the sample possessed relevant experience, a purposive sampling technique was employed. This approach enabled the researchers to intentionally select participants who had dined at container food courts, thereby ensuring the collected data was relevant and aligned with the objectives of the study. The survey was administered online using a self-administered questionnaire created with Google Forms and distributed via institutional email to students of Open University Malaysia (OUM) who met the experience criterion.

The questionnaire employed closed-ended questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree) to ensure consistency and ease of interpretation. The measurement items for the constructs: SMAC, SMSPC, BI, and CB were adapted from established instruments in Sutia and Fahlevi (2024), ensuring strong content validity and reliability (Table 1). Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity of responses, and communicating the purpose of the research to all participants.

Respondent Demographic Profile

A total of 161 valid responses were obtained from Malaysian individuals with experience dining at container food courts. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (60.2%) were aged between 28 and 43 years, followed by 18.6% aged 18 to 27, 14.3% aged 44 to 59, 6.2% aged 60 to 69, and 0.6% aged 70 to 78. The gender breakdown showed a higher proportion of female respondents (62.1%) compared to males (37.9%). Regarding occupation, 43.5% of participants were employed in the private sector, 23.6% in the government sector, 21.7% were students, 8.7% listed other types of employment, and 2.5% were business owners. Monthly income levels varied, with 28.0% earning between RM3,440 and RM5,249, 27.3% between RM1,800 and RM3,439, 21.1% earning

Table 1 Measurement items

SMAC SMAC1: The advertisement on social media offered me something new regarding the container food court. SMAC2: The advertisement on social media provides useful information about the container food court. SMAC3: The advertisements on social media provided me with credible information about the container food court. SMAC4: The container food court's social media advertisements were designed creatively SMAC5: The advertisements on social media assisted me in forming an opinion about the container food court. SMAC6: I am persuaded by the advertising campaigns for the container food court on social media.	**SMSPC** SMSPC1: Price deals are frequently announced on social media by the container food court. SMSPC2: New dishes are announced on social media by the container food court. SMSPC3: Themed events are announced on social media by the container food court. SMSPC4: Gifts are offered on social media by the container food court. SMSPC5: Discounts on food items or combo deals are offered on social media by the container food court. SMSPC6: Coupons for discounts or special offers are provided on social media by the container food court. SMSPC7: Exclusive dining experiences are given on social media by the container food court.
BI BI1: The container food court has a strong personality. BI2: The container food court has a powerful image. BI3: The container food court is recognised as a sustainable business with a positive image. BI4: The container food court has a good environmental reputation. BI5: The container food court is known for its innovative approach to food and dining experiences. BI6: The container food court offers a diverse and inclusive dining experience reflecting a wide range of cultures and tastes.	**CB** CB1: I enjoy exploring new culinary experiences at the container food court. CB2: I value learning about innovative food preparation, cooking techniques, and presentation at the container food court. CB3: I am satisfied with my experience at the container food court; it meets my expectations for variety and quality. CB4: I would recommend the container food court to my family and friends and share my positive experience on social networks. CB5: My positive experience at the container food court makes me eager to revisit and recommend it as a must-visit destination.

below RM1,800, 11.8% earning between RM5,250 and RM7,689, 6.2% between RM7,690 and RM11,819, and 5.6% earning RM11,820 and above. Regarding education, 42.2% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, 32.9% held a diploma, 19.9% a master's degree, and 5.0% a PhD. The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, occupation, income, and educational background.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through the structured questionnaire were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The analysis comprised multiple stages to ensure robustness and statistical validity. Descriptive statistics were first applied to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to examine the central tendencies and dispersion of the main constructs. To evaluate the reliability of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct, confirming internal consistency across the scales. Pearson correlation analysis was then conducted to assess the strength and direction of the bivariate relationships among the key variables. Lastly, one-way ANOVA tests were used to evaluate the significance of each independent variable on CB. Together, these analytical techniques provided comprehensive insights into the hypothesised relationships and supported the empirical examination of the study's conceptual framework.

Reliability Analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the measurement instruments used in this study, a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha (α). Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 or above indicate acceptable internal consistency (Taber, 2017). The constructs measured in this study included CB, SMAC, SMSPC, and BI. The analysis revealed that the CB construct (α = 0.926), SMAC (α = 0.918), SMSPC (α = 0.902), and BI (α = 0.909) all demonstrated high levels of reliability (Table 2). These results confirm that the instruments used to measure the study's key variables are statistically reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha for construct reliability (N = 161)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
CB	5	0.926
SMAC	6	0.918
SMSPC	7	0.902
BI	6	0.909

Note: Cronbach's alpha values ≥ 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability (Taber, 2017).

Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients alongside the means and standard deviations for all key constructs measured in the study. The results reveal strong and statistically significant positive correlations between CB and each of the independent variables: SMAC (r = .712, p < .001), SMSPC (r = .594, p < .001), and BI (r = .805, p < .001). Based on Turney's (2023) guidelines, coefficients above .50 are interpreted as strong associations, suggesting that higher perceptions of social media content and brand image are consistently linked with increased customer behavioural responses. Furthermore, the intercorrelations among the independent variables were also statistically significant. They ranged from moderate to strong (r = .678–.733, p < .001), indicating meaningful relationships without exceeding multicollinearity thresholds, confirming the distinctiveness of each construct. These findings offer initial empirical support for the hypothesised model and validate the inclusion of all constructs for subsequent analyses.

Table 3 Pearson correlations and descriptive statistics

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. CB	3.70 (0.82)	—			
2. SMAC	3.83 (0.82)	.712***	—		
3. SMSPC	3.79 (0.82)	.594***	.678***	—	
4. BI	3.71 (0.76)	.805***	.733***	.712***	—

Note. ***p < .001.

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), Pearson correlation coefficients, and ANOVA results to assess the explanatory power and statistical significance of the hypothesised

relationships. The model demonstrated substantial explanatory strength, accounting for 68.1% of the variance in CB ($R^2 = 0.681$), indicating that the combined influence of SMAC, SMSPC, and BI meaningfully predicts customer responses. Table 4 summarises the correlation coefficients and ANOVA results for the three independent variables in relation to CB. The results indicate that all predictors have statistically significant and positive effects. SMAC showed a strong positive correlation with CB ($r = .712$), supported by a significant ANOVA F-value of 54.05 ($p < .001$). Similarly, SMSPC was also strongly correlated ($r = .594$), with an F-value of 34.18 ($p < .001$). Brand Image demonstrated the strongest relationship ($r = .805$), with an F-value of 109.42 ($p < .001$), confirming its dominant role in influencing CB. Following Turney (2023), correlations exceeding .50 are considered strong, and as Field (2013) notes, higher F-values reflect greater explanatory power. These findings provide robust empirical evidence for the hypothesised direct relationships and support the relevance of all three predictors within the structural framework of the study. These results underscore the importance of brand perception and strategic social media content in shaping consumer decisions in the context of container food courts and affirm the theoretical model's overall validity.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of SMAC, SMSPC, and BI on CB among Malaysian consumers frequenting Container Food Courts. The analysis revealed that all three independent variables had a statistically significant and positive impact on CB, with BI emerging as the most influential predictor. These findings offer strong empirical support for the hypothesised relationships and highlight the strategic role of digital marketing content and brand perception in shaping consumer actions in modern food retail environments.

Brand Image demonstrated the strongest correlation with CB, suggesting that customers are more likely to engage with and remain loyal to brands that project a clear, consistent, and trustworthy identity. Albarq et al. (2022) noted that a strong brand image fosters consumer trust and encourages repeat patronage. This finding is consistent with Mabkhot and Piaralal's (2024) assertion that brand image enhances perceived behavioural control by increasing consumer confidence in purchasing decisions. In the context of Container Food Courts, where multiple vendors operate under a shared environment, both the individual identity of each vendor and the collective ambience of the space contribute to the perceived brand image (Fahlevi et al., 2019; Lu & Chen, 2017). Tangible factors such as product presentation, packaging, and environmental design, alongside intangible attributes like customer service, social values, and emotional resonance, collectively shape customer attitudes and behavioural outcomes (Faircloth et al., 2001; Cretu & Brodie, 2007).

In addition to BI, both SMAC and SMSPC were also found to influence CB significantly. These results affirm prior research suggesting that interactive and visually compelling advertising content plays a vital role in generating consumer interest and improving brand recall (Duffett, 2017; Ertz et al., 2019). Similarly, sales promotions disseminated through social media, such as discounts, giveaways, and flash deals, can drive immediate consumer action by creating a sense of urgency and value (Chandon et al., 2000). While SMAC and SMSPC contribute meaningfully to short-term engagement and conversion, this study reinforces that long-term behavioural commitment is most effectively sustained through a well-established and positively perceived brand image.

Table 4 Predictor summary: correlation and ANOVA results

Predictor	Correlation (r)	ANOVA F-value	p-value	Interpretation
SMAC	0.712	54.049	< .001	Strong positive and significant
SMSPC	0.594	34.185	< .001	Strong positive and significant
BI	0.805	109.419	< .001	Very strong positive and significant

Note. $r > .50$ indicates a strong positive relationship (Turney, 2023). Higher F-values reflect stronger predictive power (Field, 2013). All predictors are significant at $p < .001$.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of the TPB by extending its applicability to digital marketing within the context of Malaysia's Container Food Courts. The significant associations identified between SMAC, SMSPC, BI and CB confirm the continued relevance of TPB in explaining consumer decision-making in digitally mediated environments (Ajzen, 1991). Notably, Brand Image emerged as the most influential factor, reinforcing the construct of perceived behavioural control, where consumer trust and confidence in a brand enhance their likelihood of engaging in purchasing behaviour (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2016). Additionally, the effects of advertising and promotional content support TPB's components of attitudes and subjective norms, illustrating that both emotional appeal and social influence are critical in shaping behavioural intentions. These findings expand TPB's theoretical scope by highlighting how digitally delivered brand experiences, comprising both cognitive and affective elements, shape consumer behaviour in visually rich, interactive social platforms (Faircloth et al., 2001; Sutia et al., 2023). Rather than challenging its core propositions, this study provides evidence that TPB can be effectively adapted to accommodate new dynamics introduced by social media and digital promotion. It offers a nuanced understanding of how consumer behaviour is shaped in contemporary online environments. In this way, the study refines the theory by illustrating how digital and brand-related factors interplay with traditional TPB constructs, providing a more comprehensive lens for understanding consumer decision-making in digital environments.

From a managerial perspective, the results offer actionable insights for business owners, digital marketers and practitioners in the food and beverage industry, particularly for operators of urban container food courts aiming to build a sustainable competitive advantage. Given the primacy of Brand Image, managers should focus on developing coherent and authentic digital narratives, emphasise sustainability, and actively engage with customer feedback to enhance brand equity and customer loyalty (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Social media advertising and promotional strategies must be crafted to align with evolving consumer expectations, leveraging visual storytelling, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content. Furthermore, policymakers are instrumental in supporting this ecosystem by enforcing transparent and ethical digital marketing practices, regulating influencer disclosures, and promoting digital literacy. Incentivising responsible content creation and fostering public trust in digital marketing can contribute to a more ethical and resilient food service sector in Malaysia.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of SMAC, SMSPC, and BI on CB toward Container Food Courts in Malaysia, several limitations warrant attention. First, the relatively modest sample size of 161 respondents, though statistically acceptable, may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different cultural contexts (Hair et al., 2019). The cross-sectional design also captures consumer behaviour at a single time, excluding seasonal fluctuations, trend dynamics, or longitudinal behavioural changes. Moreover, using self-reported data introduces potential response bias, as participants may overstate positive behaviours due to social desirability (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research should consider longitudinal studies or incorporate experimental and observational methodologies to triangulate findings and strengthen causal inferences.

Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms and emerging technologies such as AI-driven personalisation and AR-based marketing requires that future investigations adapt to these transformations and explore their long-term implications on consumer engagement. Finally, this study did not explore cultural, psychological, or ethical dimensions that may moderate the effects of digital marketing strategies. Future work should examine how cultural values, emotional responses, and digital trust influence consumer interpretation of social media content and assess how brands can effectively integrate sustainability and ethical considerations into their social media marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the influence of Social Media Advertising Content (SMAC), Social Media Sales Promotion Content (SMSPC), and Brand

Image (BI) on Customer Behaviour (CB) within the context of Malaysia's Container Food Courts. All three variables demonstrated a significant and positive effect on customer behaviour, with Brand Image emerging as the most influential predictor. This highlights the essential role of trust, identity, and perceived brand value in driving consumer engagement and loyalty. The findings affirm the theoretical relevance of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in a digital marketing context, particularly by demonstrating how brand perception and online content influence attitudes, perceived social norms, and behavioural control. From a managerial perspective, the results underscore the importance of coherent brand strategies and targeted digital engagement. Furthermore, the study points to the growing need for policymakers to support ethical and transparent digital marketing practices through appropriate regulatory frameworks and consumer education initiatives. Together, these insights provide a foundation for enhancing strategic marketing practices and advancing sustainable growth in Malaysia's evolving food and beverage industry.

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