

**“Above the Cup”: Examining the Relationship Between Brand Equity
in Millennial Coffee Shop Preference in Ireland.**

SIMONE PEREIRA DOS SANTOS (x23130105)

Supervisor: Michael Bane

Submitted to the National College of Ireland

August 2024

Abstract

The current study investigates the relationship between brand equity and preference for coffee shops among millennials in Ireland. Brand equity, which encompasses *‘brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty, has an impact on consumer decision-making’* (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 1993). This study aims to investigate the effects of factors on Millennial customers of coffee shops.

This study used the Research Onion framework (Saunders *et al.*, 2019) to conduct qualitative research. The data insights are derived naturally via the use of grounded theory and theme analysis. An in-depth interview was conducted with four coffee shop customers and one manager in Ireland, all of whom belong to the Millennial generation.

The findings indicate that brand awareness and perceived quality have the most significant impact on the decision-making of Millennials. Moreover, the act of acquiring superior goods and services while upholding moral responsibility and showing dedication to the welfare of society significantly enhances consumer loyalty towards a company. The study highlights the significant influence of digital activities and media engagement on determining consumer preferences, since millennials are actively involved in internet and social activities, according to Sudarman (2023).

Still, the use of qualitative approaches can restrict the generalisation of these findings to a larger population. Other research projects could utilise quantitative approaches and increase the number of sampling processes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) therefore enhancing the generalisability of results.

According to the report, it is essential for coffee shop managers and entrepreneurs who want to attract Millennials and enhance brand value to prioritise quality, authenticity, and a robust digital link.

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing discourse on brand equity and consumer preferences, providing theoretical and practical benefits to scholars and professionals. The study admits its primary findings, limitations, and suggestions for further research. To have a better understanding of how to attract Irish Millennial customers, coffee shop owners should focus on tackling these specific challenges.

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Module: Dissertation (MSCMRKD1)

Supervisor: Michael Bane

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Acknowledgements

I simply wanted to express my gratitude to everyone who supported and encouraged me throughout the difficult process of finishing my dissertation.

To start, I would like to thank my supervisor, Michael Bane, for all of his guidance, support, and assistance all over my study. His insightful critiques and practical suggestions were invaluable to me as I developed my dissertation.

The friendships I've formed with my colleagues and the conversations we've had that have helped me improve my ideas significantly. Thank you for being a friend and for supporting me.

Each one of the respondents that took part in this research and contributed so freely of their precious time and insights have my deepest gratitude. The effectiveness of this study relies heavily on your openness and honesty in participating and responding.

No matter how far away I am from my family in Brazil, I can always feel your love and support. The strength and inspiration I've needed have come from you, thank you! Also, thank you for always being there for me, my Irish family; without you guys, none of this would have been possible.

I also want to extend sincere thanks to my friends for being so kind and supportive during this whole process. I have always been motivated by your never-ending trust on me.

My boyfriend, you have been there for me from the very beginning, and I am very grateful. Thanks babe, for your everlasting support and love.

And finally, in honour of my grandmother, whose memory remains to motivate me every day.

Thank you all!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background on the Research Topic

In the discipline of marketing, brand equity represents the extra value a brand offers for a given product or service beyond its basic qualities. An organization's brand reflects its market dominance and greatly influences consumer behaviour, which is shaped by their experience, attitudes, and reactions (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Aaker (1991) defines brand equity mostly as the result of '*perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand connections*'. These components taken together influence corporate results and customer preferences (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

For millennials specifically, understanding brand equity in the coffee shop sector offers a different perspective. Born between 1981 and 1996, this group known as the cohort exerts a significant economic impact and has different spending patterns (Bucută, 2015; Dimock, 2019). Because of their recognised value for experiences, authenticity, and ethical shopping that is, for coffee shop owners millennials are a vital demographic to attract (Smith, 2011).

Ireland's coffee market has grown significantly; a considerable rise in speciality coffee shops reflects the changing interests and passions of its people, especially those of the millennial age (Bord Bia, 2022). The very competitive Irish coffee industry consists of small independent companies in addition to multinational corporations. Euromonitor (2019) states that notwithstanding the widespread availability of franchise coffee shops like Starbucks, Costa Coffee, and Insomnia, there is a growing popularity of smaller coffee houses that provide personalised customer service and handmade products. The evolution of brand equity in this industry is influenced by the interaction between local consumer preferences and the international brand strategies (Dong & Yu, 2020).

Understanding the present situation of the Irish coffee shop business, it is crucial to examine the impact of brand equity on the preferences among millennials. This research might offer entrepreneurs with valuable insights to better attract this important group. Gaining insight into these connections may

enable coffee enterprises to adapt their marketing strategies to align with the tastes and requirements of the millennial demographic. Within the highly demanding Irish market, that will ensure consistent growth and enhance their brand equity.

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

Although brand equity has been well and extensively studied by researchers such as Aaker (1991; 1992), Keller (1993), Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) and many others, there are significant gaps in understanding of how it specifically influences the choices of Millennials when it comes to coffee shops, especially in the Irish setting. Broader findings are frequently presented in existing research, which only fails to sufficiently tackle the distinctive characteristics and behaviours of Millennials located in Ireland. For the purpose to narrow down this gap, it is important to look into key enquiries as such:

- (1) What is the effect of various elements of brand equity on the choices of Millennials for coffee shops in Ireland?
- (2) To what extent do social principles influence the development of these preferences?
- (3) What factors do Irish Millennials consider while selecting one coffee establishment over another?
- (4) What is the influence of internet activities among Irish Millennials upon their view of coffee shop businesses?

1.3 Research Justification and Rationale

The rationale for “*examining the relationship between brand equity and Millennial coffee shop preferences in Ireland*” is the absence of direct support addressing how brand equity boosts repetitive purchases, and the customer choosing one setting over another among the millennials demographic. Although many studies have examined the factors that affect consumer behaviour through both developed and underdeveloped nations, which include brand image, brand trust, extension of brand strategies, and various

social, individual, and emotional variables, there currently has been limited research on brand equity with respect to the Irish coffee shop market. (Moses *et al.*, 2016; Thangamani, 2019; Poerwadi *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, a study conducted in Pakistan looked at how brand equity affected consumers' decisions to buy shoes. According to Ashraf *et al.*, (2017), the research considered variables including "*brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty to assess brand equity.*" Out of all the factors considered, only brand loyalty showed a significant influence. This result drives plenty of study on the specific aspects of brand equity that most affect customer acts. Research done in Indonesia also looked at how brand equity influenced consumer behaviour in the coffee sector. In Bogor, Indonesia, Rahmah *et al.*, (2018) conducted research that examined the characteristics of XYZ Coffee's customer base, examined the impact of brand equity, lifestyle, and marketing mix on consumer purchase decisions, and developed several marketing strategies based on these factors. Chima (2020) did the most similar but surface-level research on Irish millennials when found that brand awareness influences Irish coffee consumers' purchase choices.

The present research intends to close the knowledge gap by means of a qualitative inquiry on the impacts of brand equity elements on Millennials' decisions for coffee shops, especially in the Irish setting. Due to variations in national or industry-specific characteristics, the results of previous research were not directly applicable towards the Irish coffee sector. To be able to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the unique cultural traits of Ireland alongside the changing preferences of Millennials, it is essential to perform extensive research.

An investigation of the relationship between brand equity variables and the coffee shop choices of Millennials in Ireland will contribute to filling a significant research gap. Particularly in connection to the coffee shop sector, the study will enhance the present knowledge on customer preferences and brand equity by offering a comprehensive awareness of these components.

Both academics and professionals will find great value in the insights acquired as they will enable companies to develop plans attractive to Millennials and assist them to become more competitive in the market.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

This research started with a collection of questions based on past readings of the literature and gaps in the body of knowledge. Emphasising how brand equity influences these decisions, this study aimed to find the fundamental factors driving Millennial customers' preferences for Irish coffee shops. Brand loyalty, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand awareness are among the elements which Millennials evaluate when selecting a coffee setting up. Aaker (1992) and Keller (1993)'s the process of decision-making is evidently influenced by those components. Brands which align in the lifestyle and opinions of millennials are generally preferred, and they have a substantial influence on consumer preferences. This research seeks to provide thorough understanding of these traits thus enabling managers of coffee shops to target the Millennial demographic and increase brand appeal in the extremely competitive Irish industry. Thus, the particular objective of the study became to investigate the following major question: *“Examining the relationship between brand equity and the preference for coffee shops among millennials in Ireland”*.

To achieve this primary goal, the researcher has determined the particular objectives that follow to be explored further in the current study project:

- (1) To assess millennials tastes and impressions of coffee shops in Ireland.*
- (2) To find millennials preferences in relation to the surroundings and coffee shop ambience*
- (3) To determine the impact of brand equity on the decisions of millennials when selecting coffee shops in Ireland.*

1.5 Overview of Research Structure

The opening chapter offers an overview of the research's subject matter, emphasising the deficiencies in the existing body of literature and offering the reasoning and justification for doing this research study, as well as the main purpose and research objectives.

The second chapter offers a thorough summary of the current situation in the field on the coffee shop business. It covers subjects including the evolution of the Irish coffee culture, the third-place theory, the traits of the Millennial generation, the specific conditions surrounding the Irish coffee shop industry, branding, and elements influencing brand equity regards millennials and coffee shop setting.

In accordance with the "*Research Onion*" framework proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), the third chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the selected sample group, accompanied with a rationale for the justification of the chosen methodological approach. The study process includes conducting in-depth interviews and analysis, pilot testing explanation, theme analysis, as well as ethical and limited concerns.

In the fourth chapter, the interview findings, analysis, and discussion are evaluated. A thematic method identifies and discusses key topics in connection to research objectives and current literature.

The last chapter mostly focusses on the conclusion, recommendations, and suggestions for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Millennials have become a significant demographic in the coffee shop industry, exhibiting distinct brand preferences and consumption patterns (Muflikh *et al.*, 2023). Statista (2024) reports that 54.9% of Ireland's population consists of millennials, who were born between 1981 and 1996, as stated by Bucută (2015). This demographic has a strong inclination towards coffee and an increasing need for unique coffee shop experiences (Muflikh *et al.*, 2023). As millennials advance in their professional lives and achieve economic security, their expenditure on coffee and associated experiences is projected to increase (Ladhari *et al.*, 2019; Lamberton & Goldsmith, 2020).

The Irish coffee market has had tremendous growth, mostly due to younger customers who view coffee as a necessary component of their everyday routines, according to the Irish Food Board, Bord Bia (2016; 2022). As the disposable income of Millennials improves, they are more inclined to spend a greater proportion of their available funds on luxury products and engaging in premium experiences (Ladhari *et al.*, 2019). Data from Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO) backs up this trend, with discretionary income steadily increasing, notably among younger age groups (CSO, 2020). This economic effect emphasises the significance for marketers to target and keep this population. PwC Ireland (2019) also identifies millennials as a rising customer base, particularly in retail and tourism, where their spending is expected to boost demand for premium goods and services.

This chapter explores brand equity with regard to millennials' choices for Irish coffee shops. It examines consumer preferences by evaluating literature on brand equity, the notion of the "*third place*," and the history of coffee culture. Given the competitive marketplace, marketers that want to successfully engage millennial customers must first understand brand equity.

2.2 An Analysis of Coffee Shop Industry

Coffee shops have been more prevalent in public spaces in recent years, highlighting the worldwide importance of coffee as a fundamental beverage (Morris, 2013). The coffee shop industry significantly contributes to national economies, especially in areas with a high need for caffeine. In 2022, the US coffee business had a big impact on the economy. \$343.2 billion was made across a number of industries, including transportation, imports, roasting, packaging, and sales. It is evident that the coffee business is crucial for economic development and employment creation given that it employs over 2.2 million people and brings in over \$100 billion in pay income (National Coffee Association USA, 2023). The food service industry is significantly influenced by coffee shops, which see an annual sales growth rate of 9%. The rise in coffee consumption is driven by the increasing demand for coffee, evolving consumer tastes, and the trend of using coffee shops as social, work, and study environments (Suib & Ismail, 2019).

Mostly due to well-known brands like Starbucks and Kraft Heinz, North America dominates the worldwide coffee shop business. With a 4% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), Europe is the fastest-growing market; predictions for 45,400 branded coffee shops by 2020. The strong coffee culture of the area and significant imports of green coffee help to explain this development (Stellar Market Research, 2020). Ten percent more people in Ireland consume coffee since 2007; one-third of drinkers purchase it daily. Popular businesses as Costa Coffee and Starbucks make big cities home, where consumers hang out and work (O'Connell, 2018).

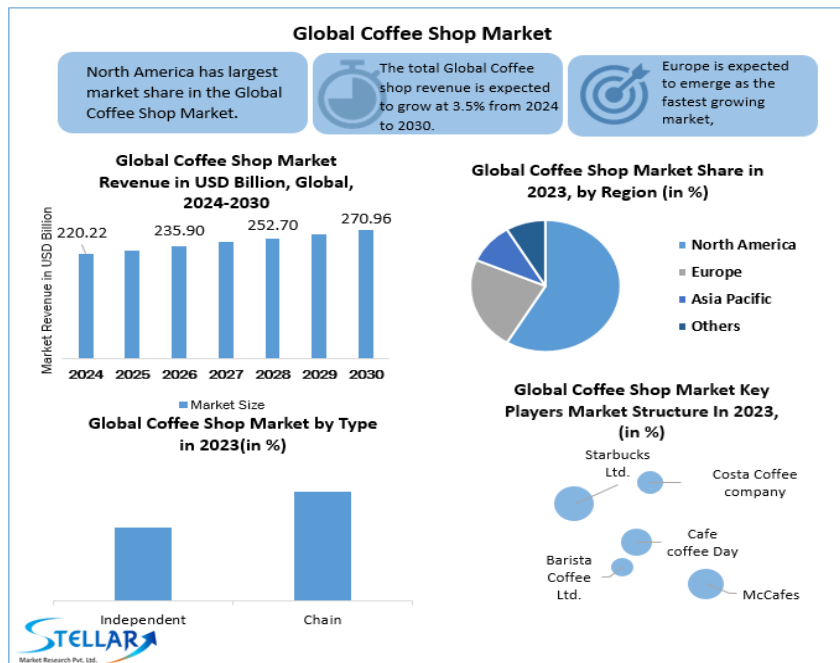


Figure 1: Global Coffee Shop Market (Stellar Market, 2020)

However, there might be impediments to the expansion of coffee consumption. Some consumers are decreasing their use of caffeine or transitioning to substitutes as a result of health-related apprehensions (Farah, 2018). Moreover, the prevalence of prominent franchises has led to the decrease of local autonomous coffee shops, therefore generating a heightened need among customers for authentic and diverse encounters (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Although coffee shops are gaining popularity as "third places" for work and socialising, others warn that this trend might weaken authentic social connections as people increasingly depend on these facilities for hybrid work. This could potentially harm in-person relationships and community bonds (Slater & Koo, 2010). This discovery indicates the possibility of future changes in consumer behaviour and market dynamics, which justifies further investigation.

2.2.1 An Overview of Coffee Culture and Evolution in Ireland

In spite of early scepticism, coffee swiftly gained popularity after being introduced to Europe in the 17th century. Even the local church in Venice denounced it as the "*Devil's creation*," but Pope Clement VIII's support enabled it to become widely accepted (Laurier, 2008; National Coffee Association USA, 2023). In large European towns include London, coffee shops quickly developed into social centres where they were called "*penny universities*" due to the cerebral debates they held and their affordable prices. More than 300 coffee shops existed in London by the late 17th century, which helped to establish illustrious establishments such as Lloyd's of London (Herschaft, 2005; Laurier, 2008; Iomaire, 2012).

Following the Boston Tea Party in 1773, there was a rise in coffee consumption across the colonies, as American preferences shifted from tea to coffee (Dutta, 2020; National Coffee Association USA, 2023). The Dutch had a crucial role in the growth of coffee production throughout the 18th century and the following flourishing of the coffee trade by establishing plantations in Java and other Indonesian islands.

Coffee made its way to South America in the early 19th century, and by 1852, Brazil had become the world's top exporter of coffee—a title it would retain for the next 100 years. Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Colombia joined Brazil as significant producers of coffee (Coren, 2023).

Following World War II, there was an "*espresso revolution*" that popularised espresso as a coffee trend worldwide and signalled the end of conventional English coffee shops. The Americano, a weaker kind of espresso, gained popularity thanks to American troops stationed in Europe during the war, and it went on to have a big impact on world coffee culture (Intile 2007; Jolliffe, 2010; Pendergrast, 2010). Many see this shift as cultural imperialism, as uniform global trends are replacing distinctive local coffee traditions.

Irish culture has included coffee shops from the 17th century, which have evolved into gentlemen's clubs in locations such as Dublin. The economic boom in Ireland during the early 21st century, known as the "*Celtic Tiger*," happened at the same time as a significant resurgence in coffee culture and the widespread adoption of speciality coffee drinks (Iomaire, 2012).

2.2.2 Competition and Concentration

From the standpoint of production of culture, national markets were defined by notable degrees of concentration; yet, in Europe the three biggest multinational companies, Nestle, Kraft, and Sara Lee, control less than 31% of the market while they have only done so by acquiring well-known "*national champion*" brands. About the US giants, Kraft controls Gevalia and Jacobs, which were bought in 1970 and 1990, so Sara Lee bought Douwe-Egberts in 1978. Along with technical developments via industrial and domestic appliances, the mechanics of the coffee trade seem to establish and preserve individual "*national*" coffee cultures (Morris 2013).

Iomaire (2012) Dublin coffee shops flourished in the 18th century, but faced fierce rivalry with clubs, hotels, restaurants, along with public pubs during the 19th when the numbers expanded; this surge was mostly driven by the construction of railroads.

2.3 The Theory of the "*Third Place*"

Roy Oldenburg notes and stresses in his 1989 book "*The Great Good Place*," the relevance of the "*third place*" in social well-being and urban development. This concept clarifies a constant, reassuring surroundings where people engage socially and find tranquilly outside of their dwelling "*first place*" and business "*second place*". Later work by Oldenburg extended this concept to include coffee shops as classic "*third places*." Similar galleries and museums, these coffee shops provide a welcome environment for friends to interact, create new relationships, and strengthen community feeling (Swapan, 2013; Saey & Foss, 2016).

The popularity of coffee shops as “*third places*” has been further popularized by cultural phenomena such as the fictional coffee shop “*Central Perk*” from Friends. During the “*dotcom boom*,” coffee shops became temporary hubs for young professionals, similar to their historical role in the 17th and 18th centuries as venues for commercial transactions (Iomaire, 2012; Anggraeni & Palupi, 2022). Coffee shops nowadays are promoted as adaptable venues for meetings, individual work, group projects, and informal study sessions (Ismoyowati *et al.*, 2023). This change draws attention to issues about the commercialisation of public areas and possible privatisation of personal connections.

The growing attention on coffee shops as diversified venues begs important issues concerning how they affect social dynamics and urban settings. Although these businesses satisfy contemporary needs for flexible environments, they might also help to commercialise public places and drive out local people, therefore changing social structures. Additionally, the emphasis on coffee shops in urban settings brings up broader concerns about consumption patterns and environmental responsibility (Ismoyowati *et al.*, 2023).

Mehta & Bosson (2009) identify various types of “*third places*,” including coffee shops, pubs, restaurants, and community centres. Despite changes over time, coffee shops have maintained their role as “*third places*” and continue to evolve. Businesses like Starbucks use “*third place*” terminology, emphasizing local and community aspects to build customer loyalty and connection. However, this marketing strategy also raises questions about its influence on customer behaviour and urban characteristics (Saey & Foss, 2016).

According to Rosenbaum *et al.*, (2007) and Saey & Foss (2016) customers recognize “*third places*” based on various meanings: place-as-practical, place-as-gathering, and place-as-home. Place-as-practical meets tangible needs like food and ambiance, while place-as-gathering and place-as-home

address emotional and social needs through interactions and feelings of belonging. Individual experiences and perceptions shape how people connect with these “*third places*,” reflecting their evolving roles in modern urban life (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2007).

2.3.1 The Starbucks Concept

Starbucks introduced a new business idea in 1970 when it launched its first location in Seattle, therefore transforming coffee consumption. Starbucks stressed premium beverages and a uniform coffeehouse environment, therefore encouraging coffee as a social and cultural activity in a “*third place*” outside of home and business. By developing and mass-distributing its own cultural brand, this strategy made Starbucks cafés popular for work, study, meetings, and socialising, consequently assisting the brand to dominate the café business (Chuang, 2019; Bondarenko & Petruzzello, 2024).

Starbucks struggled to fit local customs as it grew internationally, but its emphasis on the “*third place*” idea helped to greatly increase the acceptance of coffee shops all around—especially in relation to This change is seen in Ireland as the customer of Irish coffee has evolved from instant coffee to more refined choices. Particularly younger generations are switching from conventional bars to contemporary coffee culture, therefore encouraging social connections in these new environments (O’Connor, 2018).

Seeking fresh methods to socialise, which fits the emergence of social media and the opening of Starbucks, Irish millennials have also cut alcohol intake during the previous ten years. Younger people are increasingly attending coffee shops, engaging in mindfulness exercises, and going to the gym due in part to this trend (Bielenberg, 2017). Managing director of Irish coffee roasters Java Republic Jeffrey Long notes that cultural changes, changing lifestyles, and a greater respect of excellent food and drink are driving this increasing curiosity in coffee. With many choosing quiet cafés crowded bars,

providing a moment of rest and introspection in hectic life, coffee has grown to be a favoured social activity (Chonchúir, 2024).

2.4 The Expansion and Importance of Coffee Consumption

Ireland's coffee consumption has recently surged swiftly and is among the fastest-growing coffee markets in Europe with a 16% CAGR between 2016 and 2018 (Dutta, 2020). Ireland's coffee shop scene has expanded significantly in accordance with global trends wherein coffee has evolved from a fundamental product to a way of life (Grinshpun, 2013). Changes in world legislation, new market and supply systems, technical developments, and power asymmetries within the "*coffee value chain*" (Petit, 2007) are among the many elements driving this increase.

Speciality coffee is also attracting increasing attention in the Irish coffee market as customers search for distinctive, premium coffee experiences that investigate several tastes and brewing techniques. Coffee consumers may now engage more closely regarding the brewing operation and taste profiles because of new techniques like cold brew, AeroPress, and capsule coffee (Roddy, 2019; Statista, 2024). Dublin was named the second highest "*coffee-crazy*" city in the world in 2020, with 180 coffee shops per 100,000 individuals and annual coffee imports of €94.94 per person (Mellett, 2021). Ireland's coffee culture has evolved over many years starting with well-known Irish businesses like Bewleys, integrating American influences with the entrance of Starbucks, and finally adopting the Australian concentration on the quality and detail in every cup of coffee (Mellett, 2021). This change reflects the growing sophistication and enjoyment of coffee of Irish consumers, which influences daily life and social interaction.

2.5 Sustainability in the Coffee Consumer Market

Driven by growing customer knowledge of the social and environmental impact of coffee production, the coffee company is essentially more focused on ethical sourcing and sustainability. Consumers now demand coffee producers to support

ecologically friendly agricultural methods, aid coffee farmers' life, and adhere to moral corporate standards. Customers are becoming more interested in certification programs like Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade, resulting in guarantee that coffee meets likely ethical and social criteria (Ponte, 2004; Statista, 2024). However, such certifications are now under fire since it is claimed that they rarely have a significant positive impact on the environment or on producers. (Samper & Quiñones-Ruiz, 2017).

Eco-friendly packaging and small-batch bean roasters might enable small coffee businesses to have reduced carbon footprint. Considering the continuous influence of COVID-19, customers are more likely to help local companies that give sustainability great attention (Mellett, 2021). Though they struggle in all three sustainability areas; financial, social, and environmental; bigger coffee firms follow everything else. Social and economic concerns are particularly closely tied as many coffee producers and their employees strive to get a fair pay, which goes against the sustainability principles espoused by many coffee companies (Barreto Peixoto *et al.*, 2022).

Particularly millennials contribute to drive demand for markets for sustainable coffee. This demographic prioritises excellence, ethical procurement, and exceptional customer experiences, hence they choose specialist coffee establishments that provide meticulously produced beverages and adhere to sustainable standards. Seeking enterprises that prioritise social and environmental effect, while simultaneously valuing integrity and openness (Media Culture, 2023; Goldman Sachs, 2024).

2.6 Attributes and Attitudes of The Millennial Culture

Sudarman (2023) and Anggraeni *et al.*, (2024) have identified millennials as those born between 1981 and 1996. This generation has distinctive traits and viewpoints that have significantly influenced contemporary culture and societal norms. Tedjakumala *et al.*, (2022) identified this group as characterised by diverse ideals, expertise in technology and social media, which form the basis of their actions, as well as unique perspectives on economic and social issues.

Valentine & Powers (2013) classified millennials as self-centred, well educated, technologically skilled, intelligent, knowledgeable, and well-structured. Bucată (2015) argues that present generations have higher levels of mobility and engagement in society in comparison to previous generations. They are known for promoting social causes and backing environmentally mindful and socially responsible enterprises.

2.7 An Overview of Millennials Brand Preferences in Coffee Shop Choices

Rahmah *et al.*, (2018); Muflikh *et al.*, (2023) clearly show the existence of various coffee shops in the sector by the wide variety of propositions and characteristics given to consumers, thus demonstrating a great degree of competitiveness.

Previous research has shown that in terms of coffee shops, some traits might affect consumer preferences and decisions. Investing in improving several elements of the marketing mix—including *product, price, location, advertising, people, physical evidence, and process*—helps one to ensure the long-term survival of a coffee shop (Rahmah *et al.*, 2018; Muflikh *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, Muflikh *et al.*, (2023) underline that the primary traits as for instance; coffee taste, which has a significant influence on consumer preferences and may influence which goods people buy, especially with the spectrum of coffee beverages accessible. Customers have options while choosing the correct one that include the picture of a coffee shop, menu variations and product prices (Muflikh *et al.*, 2023).

Preference, according to Gusniawan, Kumalasari, and Azizah (2023), is the predisposition towards a certain object, defined by a propensity to make decisions depending on needs, wants, interests, and personal tastes. Indeed, the way one makes decisions depends on their preferred alternatives. Moreover, especially given the variety of coffee drinks accessible, the taste

qualities of coffee have a significant influence on consumer preferences and could therefore significantly influence their decision.

2.7.1 Trends and Insights

According to the Cone Communications CSR study from (2017) coffee companies can cultivate brand loyalty and successfully serve Millennial consumers by prioritising efficiency, sustainability, and delivering unique customer experiences.

According to Business Plus (2024), Centra has had a substantial increase of 150% in ice coffee sales compared to the previous year. According to the convenience store chain, Gen Z and especially millennial customers are driving this trend by looking for a *“refreshing caffeine boost”*. As reported by Centra, this group of customers is also more inclined to buy other non-traditional coffee items like frappés and cold brew. *“The growth of iced coffee is a well-recognised trend and Ireland is catching up on more mature markets for this product like the US and UK,”* said Jim Corcoran, Commercial Manager at Frank and Honest”.

According to Garwood (2021), millennials coffee consumers are boosting sales in the speciality sector, with 49% of those aged 25 to 39 having had at least one cup of speciality coffee in the previous day. Speciality coffee is characterised as any espresso or non-espresso-based drink, as well as conventional coffee, that customers believe was made using quality coffee beans/grounds. The wide group covers lattes, cappuccinos, iced blends, nitros, and cold brews (Garwood, 2021 & Statista, 2024).

2.7.2 The Sought Experience of Coffee Shops by Millennials

Although Millennials are often connected with a taste for luxury, ethically made coffee and distinctive coffee shop environments, their purchase behaviour is more complex. Some Millennials value price, ease, and practicality over the immersive traits, pointed out in research by (Group T.H.,

2019). Though many of Millennials prefer efficiency and utility when selecting a coffee shop, despite their reputation for pursuing aesthetic gatherings (Muflikh *et al.*, 2023). For many, the main incentive is the fast availability of caffeine to match their hectic life (Olsen, 2013).

Convenience is very important to Millennials who are balancing a lot of obligations, such as work and school (Group T.H., 2019; Waworuntu *et al.*, 2022). According to Sudarman (2023), millennials prefer interacting in environments that satisfy their desire for tranquilly and serenity. Furthermore, they may even select the atmosphere above coffee quality. To draw in Millennials, which place a high value on casual and functional connections, coffee shops should design spaces that specifically appeal to their interests.

2.7.3 Social Concern in Attracting Millennials

Millennials are increasingly driven by social awareness; they focus on ethical purchasing habits, environmental sustainability, especially social justice. Research by Tedjakumala *et al.*, (2022) shows millennials notably find social media content promoting fair trade, inclusion, and corporate social responsibility attractive. Posts highlighting coffee producers and their surroundings get great interaction because they link buyers with the source of the excellent, therefore supporting the social image and values that many millennials appreciate.

This generation actively supports businesses showing environmental and social responsibility by using their buying power and internet presence to promote firms that fit their ethical values. This conduct emphasises how millennials use their purchasing decisions to furthermore general social and environmental objectives (McGlone *et al.*, 2011; Tedjakumala *et al.*, 2022).

Millennials most importantly want businesses that demonstrate a dedication to environmental and social issues. Considered as pragmatic environmentalists, they advocate steady worldwide economic development (Lim, 2018). Their understanding of important social concerns raised by

digital media has changed their buying behaviour. Social conventions are also very important; millennials feel pressure from their social circles to act morally. Their desire to participate in pro-environmental consumption; that is, purchase organic goods and ethically produced coffee; is improved by this social influence (Moser, 2015; Abdullah *et al.*, 2022).

2.7.4 Experiential Coffee Shop Marketing

Coffee shops which offer a relaxed, trendy setting, often with contemporary architecture, decent lighting, and friendly space appropriate for both business and recreation, draw notably millennials in. Numerous coffeehouses construct Instagram/Tik Tok-worthy environments that stimulate customers to publish their experiences online, therefore fulfilling the desire for an online existence of this demographic (Sudarman, 2023).

Fascinatingly, some millennials value the special quality of tiny, neighbourhood coffee shops while others are attracted to the familiarity and ease of bigger businesses. In line with the trend towards speciality coffee and generating venues that seem like a gathering place for the community, local speciality coffee shops are presenting themselves as community centres more and more (Mehta & Bosson, 2009; Chang & Spierings, 2023).

From a critical perspective, millennials sometimes pick coffee shops depending more on atmosphere and visual attractiveness than on the quality of the coffee itself. Often more crucial than taste are the experience and environment fit for sharing on social media (Chang & Spierings, 2023). Still, Wooden (2024) millennials all over exhibit a strong taste for coffee, and their decisions are influenced by the quality that they drink as well as the transparency of its suppliers.

Less ethnocentric yet more cosmopolitan, millennials show greater curiosity in other languages, global cultures, and alternative consumer lifestyles. Putting them in contrast to generations prior, this generation's awareness to

diversity makes them more susceptible to odd branding and foreign marketing endeavours (Ismoyowati *et al.*, 2023).

2.7.5 Choice Criteria in Coffee Shop Selection

Millennial choices, style of life, and interest in products are much influenced by their own preferences. Anggraeni *et al.*, (2024) and Sunarharum *et al.*, (2021) argue that consumer preferences, or inclinations towards specific commodities or services, influence their purchasing behaviour and product demand. Millennials choose based on taste, habit, culture, and socialising; they reject low-quality coffee. Research by Samoggia & Riedel (2018) reveals that aspects including aroma, flavour, availability, price, and packaging are quite important even if pricing and availability score top. Though money is crucial, health issues often inspire interest.

Firmansyah *et al.*, (2019); Han & Ryu, (2009) found various elements affecting café choice: food quality, flavour, cleanliness, service, atmosphere. Comfort is mostly related with intangible factors (*such as the ease of not cooking a meal*) as well as with physical ones (*like the look of tables and chairs*). Particularly staff civility, service quality is also very important; any misbehaviour might result in official complaints (Srivastava, 2015).

When selecting a café, millennials respect authenticity and economy. While authenticity relates to the originality of the product or service presented, affordability describes costs within their buying capacity. Their decision-making process revolves mostly on these elements (Firmansyah *et al.*, 2019).

2.8 Branding Concept

The fundamental motivation behind all branding efforts is the innate human need to establish a sense of significance, construct personal and social identities, project oneself as both part of a community and distinct from others, and cultivate a positive reputation. Sign and symbol are crucial components of this branding phenomena (Bastos & Levy 2012).

Brands have a crucial function in marketing, particularly in managing customer expectations by delivering on the promises and propositions made by the firm. Therefore, it is evident that an emotional connection is established between customers and product manufacturers via brands. Rival companies may have comparable goods, but they are incapable to offer the identical emotional commitment to customers. Brands that have a positive reputation will get high evaluations from customers, ultimately leading to a rise in the worth of the product. Thus, a brand is a significant resource in an organisation. While a brand may not have a physical form, its worth extends beyond what can be measured or touched, stated (Rahmah *et al.*, 2018).

Many of scholars have defined branding; Kotler and Armstrong (2003), for example, claim that a brand may be any name, phrase, symbol, picture, design, or a combination of these that makes it easier to distinguish one dealer's as well a group of dealers' goods or services from competitors. This means that it offers a way to make choosing items or services easier for consumers. The concept of branding emphasises who a brand is, a complex image that communicates a meaningful meaning about the attributes, advantages, value, culture, along with personality of a company (Ajagbe *et al.*, 2014). Still, according to Ajagbe *et al.*, (2014), exposing this evidence indicates that a businessperson's most important marketing responsibility is to establish and manage several brands.

Furthermore, Dolatabadi *et al.*, (2012) suggest that the concept of branding encompasses a combination of symbolic, functional, and experiential advantages. Nowadays, branding is highly dependable, to the point which no product enters the market without a brand. Branding is crucial for several reasons: it helps consumers identify valuable products, demonstrates information about their worth, and ensures reliability in features every time customers make a purchase. Branding refers to the identity of an individual or a company, which involves the process of distinguishing what a company sells from rival brands in the market. An established brand name may effectively communicate the advantages of a product or service and enhance its memorability. To do this, it is necessary to integrate all six aspects of

branding, namely "*brand domain, brand value, brand heritage, brand assets, brand reflection, brand personality*," along with additional brand elements such as logos, symbols, packaging, and a slogan (Yeboah, 2016).

Yeboah (2016), claimed that product branding plays a crucial role in market segmentation, attracting a diverse range of customers, and promoting product loyalty. The following discourse centres on the significance of branding in coffee shop industry.

2.8.1 Branding and Coffee Shop

Within the sector of coffee chains and stores, the emotional significance of branding has special importance (Thompson *et al.*, 2006). Coffee shops serve as multifunctional spaces, functioning as social gathering points, workspaces, and areas for leisure, in addition to their primary purpose of selling coffee. The atmosphere, level of service, or overall encounter provided by coffee shops have an impact in the emotional attachment clients form with the brand. Research has shown that consumers that have a personal relationship with a coffee shop are far more inclined to demonstrate loyalty to the company and participate in repeated purchases (Ferreira, Ferreira & Bos, 2021; Sudarman, 2023).

According to Yeboah (2016), many customers make their purchasing decisions based on their preferred brands. They argue that branding helps consumers easily identify products. By encouraging consumers' consistent purchase habit, products may be made easily identifiable. Intentionally, brands help companies differentiate their products or services from those of their competitors. This, in turn, establishes the service provider's brand identity.

Furthermore, according to Agustin (2021), the design as a component of branding in a coffee shop's aesthetic should be capable of creating an ambiance and experience that attracts consumers to return time and time again while also making it easy for them to complete transactions. It should also be

possible to relate the quality and speed of service delivery with the environment.

2.8.2 Definitions and Conceptual Frameworks of Brand Equity

Brand equity is the perceived worth of a brand in the perspective of customers, moulded by the activities of a business trying to define its market niche. Aaker (1992) and Jalilvand, Samiei, & Mahdavinia (2011) brand equity comprises both positive and negative connotations connected to the name and image of a business. These relationships could improve the whole value of a brand, but they can also oversimplify intricate customer behaviour and market dynamics.

Aaker's (1992) model of brand equity provides a structure including elements like 'distinctiveness, brand personality, corporate affiliations, *'brand recognition, market share, price, distribution coverage, customer satisfaction/loyalty, perceived quality, popularity, perceived value'*. However, this approach often ignores the influence of socioeconomic variables and constantly changing customer preferences on brand equity. Differentiating goods or services in a competitive market depends on brand equity, which previous research have proven to be absolutely vital and greatly influences customer brand preferences (Akhtar *et al.*, 2016). Although they understand the significance of their brand, many businesses struggle to retain consumers and fail to effectively meet consumer demands by means of its use.

Several theoretical methods exist to measure brand equity. Aaker's model provides a whole perspective whilst Keller's (1993) consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model focusses on consumer views and experiences and arranges into four stages: *"brand recognition, brand meaning, brand response, and brand resonance"*. Emphasising the effect of brand knowledge, including awareness and image, on customer reactions, this consumer-centric approach stresses (Keller 2001; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2015).

Most importantly, brand equity has come under close attention as a major determinant of customer purchase choices (Thangamani, 2019). Its effect on coffee consumption is still unknown, however, as other elements such cost, quality, packaging, and ownership have major influence (Poerwadi *et al.*, 2019). Businesses in this field must first understand how brand equity affects consumers of Irish coffee choices.

2.8.3 The Variables Determining Brand Equity

From a critical point of view, many connected elements affect brand equity in the context of coffee shop preferences. Customers who know a coffee shop are more likely to frequent it, so brand awareness, *which spans both brand recognition and recall*, is fairly significant (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Moreover, very significant for consumer impressions and loyalty are brand relationships including ethical origins and perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988; Keller, 1993).

De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp (2005) claim that coffee shops stressing fair trade principles and quality coffee have shown better brand equity. Consumer turnover and repeat business point to brand loyalty, which boosts brand equity in reply. Loyalty customers might act as brand advocates, suggests Chaudhui & Holbrook (2001). Not less significant is the perceived value of the coffee shop, which combines the pragmatic and experience benefits of the ambiance and service (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Brand differentiation—which comprises of unique product offerings and creative service models—helps to establish brand equity by providing consumers persuasive reasons to prefer one coffee shop over another (Kapferer, 2012). If one wishes to provide a constant and pleasant picture of the coffee shop brand, good brand communication is essential. This means consistently and relevance-oriented correspondence (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). These elements taken together establish the power and value of the brand equity of a coffee shop in the extremely competitive sector.

2.9 Conclusion

This research examines the many elements that impact the coffee shop industry, particularly in connection to the evolving coffee culture in Ireland. The notion of the "*Third Place*" is studied, emphasising the significance of coffee shops as prominent social hubs. This research primarily focusses on millennial customers, since their brand preferences and attitudes have a significant impact on coffee shop branding initiatives. According to the research, millennials prioritise experiential marketing and have specific expectations for their coffee shop experiences that align with their values and broader social concerns. The research highlights the importance of brand equity in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions, therefore providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that determine a brand's worth.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explain the methodology and reasons for *"Examining the Relationships Between Brand Equity in Millennial Coffee Shop Preference in Ireland."* The methodological approach follows Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009)'s research framework, which promotes methodical and organised research. This method uses the Research Onion model to identify and evaluate research phases. The layers include the research methodology and philosophical justification, research approach and strategy, population overview, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations and study limitations.

The current study used qualitative research to investigate and understand people's own opinions of a social problem and compare results using existing literature (Bell & Bryman 2007). However, quantitative research promotes an impartial, scientific approach employing statistics and numerical analysis (Quinlan, 2011), which ignores the very subjective character of each respondent's coffee shop decision. The qualitative research method will be shown using interpretivist, or post-positivism, unstructured interviews, which will be expounded upon.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

This study examines the factors that influence Irish millennial coffee shop preferences, with a focus on brand equity.

Research questions guide research studies, Creswell & Poth (2018). The researcher should utilise this centralised technique to cover all aspects of the inquiry. Researchers need research questions to choose their topic of study, according to Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (2012).

This study seeks to analyse brand equity and Irish millennial coffee shop preferences. The previous chapter lays the groundwork for the research's goals. The aims address the study question:

"Examining the relationship between brand equity and the preference for coffee shops among millennials in Ireland."

3.3 Research Onion Framework

The "Research Onion" is, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), a useful tool for developing a research plan according to best standards. Research design is the methodical process for data collecting and analysis intended to answer research questions and meet study objectives. It entails putting rational arguments for choosing data sources, gathering techniques, and analytic approaches (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

This method comprises a solid plan that creates ideal tactics comprising numerous levels to explore each stage of the design approach. With regard for the research topic and the researcher's ontological and epistemological points of view, the tool helps scholars choose the most appropriate strategy and method for their study (Bryman, 2016). Six layers—"Philosophy," "Approach," "Strategy," "Choice," "Time Horizon," "Data Collection and Data Analysis"—will frame the research project. All of these layers will act as the background for the study.

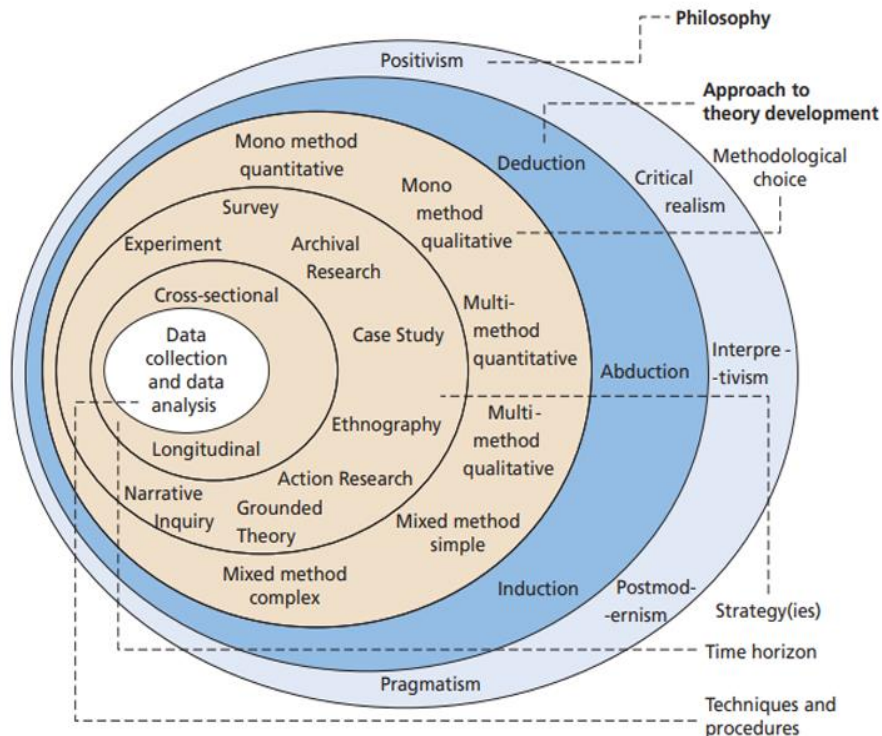


Figure 2: The Research 'Onion' (Saunders *et al.*, 2009)

3.4 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders *et al.*, (2019), research philosophy is "*a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research.*" There is no broadly applicable philosophical viewpoint for business concerns Saunders *et al.*, (2016). Still, based on the particular study issue, researchers may take varied philosophical stances. Quinlan (2011) claims that every research project starts with philosophical underpinnings. Based on either the researcher adopts a truthful perspective or not, the outer layer of the Research Onion represents the ideas that define her ontological worldview. It also covers the epistemology, or our sense of how we could come to understand depending on our ontology (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.4.1 Ontology

According to Slevitch (2011), ontology, likewise epistemology, originates from the Greek terms 'onto', which represents reality or existence, and 'logia', which denotes the study or science. Quinlan (2011), claim that ontology pertains to the examination of existence, the essence of existence, and our modes of functioning in the world, ontology perceives the universe by examining a sequence of occasions and the diversity of individuals and the unique construction of their thoughts.

This research adopts a nominalist ontology, which asserts that reality is formed via social interactions and perceptions (Wilholt, 2006). This is related to the subjective aspect of customer preferences, since each person's opinion about the brand value and characteristics of coffee shops is distinct and influenced by individual experiences along with cultural factors.

An interpretivist approach to knowledge and understanding is a particularly suitable choice, given the different viewpoints and individual preferences that millennials possess with respect to coffee establishments. Interpretivism acknowledges, according to Saunders *et al.*, (2009), people have different

viewpoints and interpretations shaped by their particular experiences. This makes it well-suited for examining the multifaceted and subjective aspects of brand equity and consumer preferences given this particular context. This methodology enables the researcher to comprehend and analyse the significance that millennials attribute to various coffee shops along with their brands, so offering profound insights into the elements that influence their choices from one coffee shop upon another.

3.4.2 Epistemology

Saunders *et al.*, (2009) claim that epistemology, a branch of philosophy dedicated to comprehending and investigating the nature of knowing, this study's main goal is to find how millennials' preferences for Irish coffee shops are affected by brand equity. To achieve this, qualitative in-depth interviews will be conducted with the goal of providing reliable and accurate information (Bryman & Bell 2011).

One may classify epistemology among two main approaches: positivist and interpretivist. Rooted in the belief that objective facts or principles exist apart from human ideas is positivism. It usually uses a logical approach, analysing hypotheses developed from accepted knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Positivist epistemology promotes the use of scientific methods to investigate contemporary society and other fields of study, considering both persons and the influence of natural science (Bryman & Bell 2011). On the other hand, according to Saunders *et al.*, (2009), interpretivism adopts an inductive approach, aiming to comprehend the subjective interpretations and personal encounters of people. Interpretivist in contrast to positivist theories, recognises the unique characteristics of people in their relationship with the natural world (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Often associated with interpretivism, grounded theory improves this strategy by allowing interpretations to develop naturally from the facts instead than pushing predestined assumptions (Thornberg, 2017). Investigating events like millennial tastes for coffee shops that are contextually dependent and complex calls for this approach particularly well. By use of grounded theory,

this study will follow a repeated process of data collecting and analysis, thereby ensuring the results produced are firmly founded on the opinions and experiences generated by the interviewees.

3.4.3 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is defined by Saunders *et al.*, (2009); Saunders & Tosey, (2012); and Alharahsheh & Pius, (2020) to be a philosophical paradigm for examining social experience. Not particular events, interpretivism looks at how people perceive and relate in their social surroundings. People's views of their actions and social environment are sought to be understood by studying people rather than objects. Interpretivist researchers realise that biases influence their findings. They recognise that social factors and participants affect observable phenomena. Thus, qualitative results from extensive research with smaller and specific sample sizes are generally included in data collection and analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Saunders & Tosey, 2012; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Researchers must be mindful of personal biases and ideas, which may affect the research. Self-awareness, acknowledging biases, and using ways to decrease their impact on study results may help solve this problem.

Saunders *et al.*, (2016) reinforce that interpretivism seeks to achieve a greater grasp of the social realities experienced by humans. It regards individuals as subjective entities, whose own social environments, emotions, beliefs, and perspectives are significant and meaningful.

Mack (2010) and Dudovskiy (2016) highlight the basic disadvantage of interpretivist research: its subjectivity. As a consequence, the findings could not be extended to a larger population or situation. Greene & McClintock (1991) argue in support of the interpretivist technique because different people may perceive importance in the context differently. As a result, displaying these many points of view is required to properly appreciate the whole picture. since the outcome for every consumer is subjective, whilst

each individual has unique feelings and experiences when it comes to the link between brand equity and millennial coffee purchasers in Ireland, this study adopts an interpretivist philosophical approach, which involves investigating individuals in their native contexts by conducting in-depth interviews involving millennials. This approach is comparable to the one used by Tsimonis & Dimitradis (2013), whose work performed qualitative interviews. This sets them apart from the bulk of researchers who have opted for quantitative methods (Saunders & Tosey 2012).

3.5 Research Approach

Prior to initiating any study, it is crucial to provide a succinct description of the research methodology that will be used (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2015). Saunders *et al.*, (2009) identified two primary research approaches: the Deductive Approach along with the Inductive Approach. The deductive approach involves generating a set of hypotheses which are evaluated based on established theories, while the inductive approach focuses on collecting data and constructing theories based on the observed outcomes or results.

According to Bryman & Bell (2011), the deductive technique involves assessing and comparing findings against pre-existing hypotheses in order to identify any link between the study and the existing theory. This shows clearly the theoretical posture of the researcher, unlike an inductive approach.

Furthermore, Saunders *et al.*, (2016) contend that whilst the deductive method uses larger sample sizes and employs quantitative techniques, the inductive approach generally stresses qualitative methods with low sample sizes. Using an inductive technique, the focus is on the appropriate theory, but the goal is to develop new theory by interpreting the acquired facts. As a result, the theoretical viewpoint is not explicitly stated (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

This study employs an inductive approach. This methodology enables the formulation of theories based on the gathered facts, rather than verifying an already established hypothesis. Inductive approach is well-suited for qualitative research since it allows for a thorough investigation of

respondents' views and experiences, which is essential for comprehending the complex preferences of millennials about coffee shops in Ireland (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.5.1 Grounded Theory

The theory is fundamentally based on the empirical data that has been gathered, and it facilitates the examination and further refinement of ideas after data collection (Khan 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). According to Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman (2015), research questions are the starting point for most grounded theory studies, after which researchers gather qualitative data to try to provide a response.

By using a grounded theory method, the researcher was able to look closely at the subject issue and the actions of the respondents, providing thorough and pertinent findings and interpretations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In line with this study, the ideas and viewpoints that surfaced from the data collection will be reviewed by the researcher when they are categorised applying codes, or as happens in this case, thematic analysis. The concept is based on the major themes, setting this approach apart from quantitative scientific research approaches.

Thematic method, a component of grounded theory, enables researchers to develop ideas that elucidate people' perceptions and interpretations of the subject under examination by organising themes found in the gathered data. The researcher will use an inductive technique (Khan, 2014) to examine the interview transcripts and determine the main themes that impact millennials' coffee shop choices.

3.5.2 Inductive and Deductive

According to Bryman & Bell (2011), a deductive technique focusses on the link between established literature and theory pertaining to the subject of research, frequently in the realm of science (Bryman & Bell, 2011). An examination of prior research and established theories pertaining to the topic under investigation is conducted, followed by the empirical testing of the

hypotheses derived from these theories. In their quantitative study, Bognar *et al.*, (2019) show these phenomena by experimentally testing their hypothesis using poll findings. This approach enables the researcher to keep a clear theoretical focus, hence producing a verified hypothesis (Saunders *et al.*, 2019; Bryman, 2016).

This research aims to investigate the coffee shop preferences of millennials in Ireland by analysing their subjective thoughts and beliefs. This allows the researcher to comprehend how this group of individuals perceives their choices using a more adaptable technique, hence confirming the use of an inductive strategy instead of a deductive one.

An inductive strategy incorporates the researcher collecting pertinent data related to their study subject and then analysing and discovering patterns among the gathered data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). By categorising and analysing patterns, researchers may construct a theory and reasoning that explains the link amongst the patterns and the investigated topic (Bryman, 2016). The empirical technique is more suitable for this study since the researcher aims to construct novel current theories and perceptions on millennials' coffee shop preferences based on semi-structured interviews. This adheres to an interpretivist perspective, aligning with Hiller (2010), who states that such perspectives inherently lean towards a research strategy that employs qualitative methods (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

It will be valuable for the research since it will shed light on the responses and feelings about coffee shop choices, giving researchers greater flexibility in understanding how respondents see their social environments.

3.6 Research Strategy

Saunders *et al.*, (2016), suggest that employing an interpretivist lens along with an inductive strategy through qualitative methods alongside small samples yields superior research data compared to bigger samples and quantitative methods. Consequently, this study opted to support a qualitative method involving in-depth interviews alongside a small sample. In order to understand the perspectives of millennial customers regarding brand equity

and coffee shop preference in Ireland, methods including case studies and also netnography could potentially have been used. However, the use of in-depth interviews was deemed most appropriate for this study as it allows respondents to share their experiences and provide the researcher with a variety of knowledge and ideas on the subject (Morris 2015 and Bryman, 2016).

Focus group research may generate useful insights and emotions via group dynamics, making it suited for the current study, according to Quinlan (2011). The researcher should understand group dynamics and communal influence, especially "*groupthink*," when people adapt to the general attitude rather than expressing their own opinions (Adams *et al.*, 2014). Ignoring the actual emotions of the audience carries danger. While in-depth interviews can be affected by their authority and impact dynamics, controlling and correcting them one-on-one is simpler than guiding a group.

The researcher aimed to accurately represent respondents' honest ideas, feelings, and views in order to guarantee that it fairly represented the target population. For this, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews, which may be anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours, are designed to investigate a phenomena or individuals via unstructured or semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016). In-depth interviews and other semi-structured, open-ended methods, according to Jankowicz (2005), "*provide with large amounts of rich, fertile, but disorganised data.*" To uncover significance, it is crucial that the researcher arranges and analyses the data.

3.7 Time Horizon

Research investigations typically include two primary forms of time horizons: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Cross-sectional study is performed at a certain moment in time to examine specific concerns, whilst longitudinal study is conducted over a prolonged period to analyse occurrences and patterns throughout time (Sekaran, 2003; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

This study uses a cross-sectional approach to examine the relationship between brand equity and millennial coffee shop decisions in Ireland over a

specified timeframe. Sekaran (2003) Saunders *et al.*, (2016), this methodology allows the collection of data at an appropriate time, providing a clear summary of the present state of the phenomena being studied. The cross-sectional methodology is suitable for this research as it effectively gathers quick responses and pertinent data required to comprehend the current dynamics of brand equity and customer preferences in the Irish coffee shop business.

According to Saunders *et al.*, (2016), the cross-sectional technique ensures that the research is completed within the allocated period by facilitating efficient data gathering in a shorter amount of time, which is advantageous given the limits and deadline limits of the dissertation. Additionally, this method uses less resources and is cost-effective. It is crucial to recognise that a longer, longitudinal research (Gill, 2000), could provide deeper insights, even if this approach is suitable for a preliminary analysis of the sector—especially because the research of this kind had not been conducted in Ireland previously. This is a proposal for another study to expand on the results of the previous one.

For this research, five individuals participated in private, semi-structured online interviews over the course of two weeks within July 2024. The interviews made use of Microsoft Teams, which enabled automated transcript generation and recordings of video. This approach simplified the procedures of classifying and assessing themes and allowed the study of every respondent's nonverbal expression. The online component of the analysis was resource-efficient and provided important data for the cross-sectional results, therefore benefiting the general research project.

Furthermore, video technologies are progressively used for real-time communication. The Covid-19 epidemic has significantly expedited this phenomenon. Academics and practitioners have to rapidly increase their proficiency with video technologies, such as Zoom and MS Teams, to carry out their job effectively (Miller & Sinanan 2014; de Villiers *et al.*, 2021).

3.8 Primary Data Collection

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The collection of primary data throughout this study was conducted via the use of semi-structured interviews. The selection of this approach was based on its versatility and capacity to offer comprehensive understanding of the respondents viewpoints along with experiences. Semi-structured interviews are very advantageous in qualitative research because they enable thorough investigation of respondents' ideas and emotions, which is crucial for comprehending intricate phenomena (King & Horrocks, 2010; Bryman, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews involve a guided discussion in which particular subjects are investigated using open-ended questions. This strategy lets the researcher focus on certain areas that are pertinent and gives the respondents the chance to voice their opinions in the way they prefer (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

This methodology guarantees where the researcher may go further into particular topics of interest, which is essential for obtaining the nuances and complex viewpoints of participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In-depth interviews were chosen to accurately document respondents' opinions on the issue. Detailed interviews offer insightful analysis of basic beliefs and reasons (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By means of the examination of respondents' subliminal signals and speech pronunciations, the MS Teams capturing interviews revealed their actual intents and relevance outside what they say (Opdenakker, 2006; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

Key components in qualitative research include in-depth interviews and focus groups. Focus groups, which are researcher-led conversations that promote group connectedness and varied points of view, have great power (Krueger & Casey 2014). They could additionally trigger control or compliance, which would distort the outcomes. In in-depth interviews, participants may freely convey their points of view; these are only and targeted (Gill *et al.*, 2008).

This research gains a full grasp of the phenomena under investigation by using semi-structured interviews, which provide the necessary depth and variety. The methodology enables the collection of comprehensive qualitative data, which is essential for gaining a sophisticated comprehension of the current situation in the Irish coffee shop sector and the variables that impact the preferences of millennials (Patton, 2015).

3.8.2 Population Sample

Sampling is an essential part of both qualitative and quantitative research, as Saunders *et al.*, (2016) point out. Getting comprehensive insights is usually more important in qualitative research than generalising conclusions. However, in order to improve the validity and importance of the findings, it must be certain that the sample fairly reflects the community under study. It is therefore essential to choose research subjects who somewhat match the intended target population. Care has been paid to the choice of the most relevant sample (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

The target population for the study was millennials—those born between 1981 and 1996—Sudarman, (2023); Anggraeni *et al.*, (2024). This choice was made because Millennials have a substantial impact on consumer trends and possess considerable buying power. Their active engagement with coffee culture and brands, particularly perhaps social media, makes them a critical demographic for understanding brand equity in the coffee shop sector.

As defined by Davies (2007), probability sampling, involves the use of proven statistical processes to evaluate the probability of differences between the sample results and the population. This approach is distinct from non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling involves selecting respondents in a non-random manner, which suggests the sample is unable to generalised to the full population. However, this method assures that participants meet certain requirements. The researcher opted for non-probability sampling for this study, since it is considered the most appropriate method for qualitative analysis, as stated by (Etikan *et al.*, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The use of non-probability sampling is quite unlike probability

sampling, where *"using established statistical procedures, you can estimate the likelihood that your findings for the sample differ from the population"* (Martin & Nathan 2007). Non-probability assures that the respondents meet certain requirements but does not guarantee that they are selected at random, making the sample ineffective for generalising to the full group. Purposive sampling, which is defined as *"the researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis,"* proved the non-probability sampling strategy that was used (Bryman & Bell 2011; Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

3.9 Pilot Testing

The main objective of the pilot test is to verify the reliability of the data collection equipment and its ability to reliably measure the target variables (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Put another way, the goal is to develop and enhance the intervention strategies that will be used to guide and support the researcher, as well as to confirm if the device captures the desired variables properly and avoid the research to fail (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002; Wadood *et al.*, 2021).

As defined by Sekaran & Bougie (2019), is a beginning study carried out to assess the viability, duration, expense, risk, and unfavourable outcomes associated with a certain research strategy or technique. It assists in identifying any issues and enhances the primary study's reliability and uniformity (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

3.9.1 Main Goals of the Pilot Test

- Find out how well the responder understood the interview questions. This involves identifying and correcting any bad or confusing language so that the questions generate relevant responses. As Bryman (2016) and Saunders *et al.*, (2019) state, obtaining precise and trustworthy results calls for clear consideration of interview questions.
- Review the way the interview questions are set and organised to ensure a logical flow and fluent discourse. Shorten interviews help to enable efficient data collecting and coherent communication. Sekaran & Bougie (2019)

contend that an organised structure is very essential for encouraging a lively discussion in interviews.

- Assess the potential for respondents to have any difficulties throughout the interview, especially difficult questions or technological glitches regarding the interview process (*e.g., online interview*). Recognising these possible obstacles facilitates simplifying the interview procedure to prevent impediments in data gathering (Creswell, 2007; Wadood *et al.*, 2021).

Certain questions revealed during the pilot test did not line up with the goals of the research. These questions were modified or removed to better proportionately reflect millennial brand equity and preferences for coffee shops. The refinement approach increases the general usefulness of the acquired data and assures that the questions answered during interviews are closely related to the research goals (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The insight gained from the pilot test was critical in aligning the interview questions with the study's objectives. By utilising pilot feedback to alter the questions, the study adheres to accepted qualitative research criteria, ensuring that the data acquired properly and effectively answers the research goals (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002)

3.10 Thematic Analysis

The exact method of locating, structuring, and putting into perspective patterns of significant "*themes*" within a data collection is what Braun & Clarke (2012) identify as theme analysis. By concentrating on interpretation over a data collecting process, this method helps researchers to identify and grasp common or community ideas and feelings. The major purpose of thematic analysis is to find patterns regarding the way a subject is treated or stated, compared to just revealing unique or varied perspectives within the dataset. This method seeks to comprehend these relationships by emphasising common themes rather than focussing only on individual findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

This analysis utilises grounded theory methods to discern relationships, patterns, and trends among extensive volumes of subjective and diverse data,

offering a systematic but comprehensive comprehension of the contents (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

The researcher performed a thorough examination of the interview transcriptions in accordance with recognised criteria for qualitative research. This procedure included the use of '*open coding*,' a technique used to recognise and classify noteworthy words, ideas, or phrases among the data which either validate or question established theories (Quinlan, 2011; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). '*Open coding*' is the process of breaking data into distinct components, thoroughly analysing these components to identify patterns and distinctions, and then applying codes to each section to represent the fundamental core of the data (Quinlan, 2011).

Open coding was followed by '*axial coding*' to link codes and categories by main topics. This approach helps identify code links or translate fundamental codes into bigger concepts (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Axial coding captures a variety of facts and helps create a unified narrative to achieve research aims.

Eventually, the process of '*selected coding*' was used to merge and enhance the themes that were detected via open and axial coding, resulting in a unified theory or framework. In this step, the task is to choose the key groups and establish connections with other categories, so constructing a thorough and meticulous comprehension of the data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

The exact method used in coding and theme development ensures a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the interview data, therefore generating significant insights about the concept of brand equity and preferences of millennials about the coffee shops in Ireland.

3.11 Ethical Code of Conduct

Modern research depends much on ethics, particularly in relation to respondent prudence. It is necessary to verify that certain research projects are suitable and evaluate their moral consequences. Fulfilment with ethical standards depends on respondents' informed approval being obtained (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005; Bell & Bryman, 2007).

During the course of this study, the ethical guidelines and recommended methodologies established by the National College of Ireland (NCI) was followed. This entails acquiring informed permission from all respondents, guaranteeing anonymity and privacy of the obtained data, and carrying out the research with honesty and openness. Moreover, the chosen strategy follows the strict academic standards promoted by NCI, thereby ensuring the correctness and trustworthiness of the research findings. Following these values helps the study not just conforms to ethical standards but also preserves the great quality and reputation needed in scholarly work.

Ensuring research integrity requires commitment to the Code of Ethical Conduct. Researchers are required to thoroughly evaluate the possible effects associated with their inquiries on every participant (Bell & Bryman, 2007). According to all these ethical principles, the author of this study conducted a comprehensive ethical evaluation before to commencing the research. Across the study, this assessment defined the procedures used to ensure that respondents received sufficient treatment and were controlled in conformity with ethical criteria.

Following the interview, participants were advised about the goal of the research, their entitlements, and their freedom to drop out of the study at any point without consequence. Each interview started with a discussion of the objectives of the research, available choices for involvement, and confidentiality. Every responder was informed their answers will be anonymised in order to preserve their real identities.

3.12 Research Limitations

According to Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018), a limitation is an oversight that is imposed and consequently beyond the control of the researcher. However, it is important to note that it might have an impact on the study's design, findings, and eventually, the conclusions. Collis & Hussey (2013), describe as vulnerability or shortcoming in the study. Hence, it ought to be

explicitly stated in the report upon submission. Although this study offers interesting insights regarding the relationship among brand equity and the choice preferences of Millennials for coffee shops in Ireland, it is important to recognise some limitations.

Regarding qualitative research, the sample size can frequently be limited and may not accurately reflect the wider community in question. The study's sample size was small, perhaps impacting the scope of the results. Furthermore, the respondents' time constraints and availability presented serious difficulties, especially for managers of speciality or small coffee shops which were generally unable to engage in interviews even though they were provided with flexible choices like email or online forms. The main obstacle was from the managers' hectic schedules and the operational requirements of managing a coffee shop, which affected their capacity to take part. Consequently, the researcher was unable to compare findings as originally intended.

Time was also a major barrier on the research. The study's short duration affected sample size and needed a cross-sectional approach. This approach is good for capturing immediate dynamics, but it doesn't help observe changes and trends over time (Sekaran, 2003; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2008; Saunders, *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the data provide little insight into Millennials' brand equity beliefs and preferences.

To address these limitations, future study should consider using a larger and more diverse sample, hence increasing the reliability and application of the findings. Combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies would result in a more complete image of the target audience. According to Thomas (2003), a mixed-methods approach may produce more deep insights by combining qualitative research, which provides thorough and particular data, with quantitative research, which delivers broader and more generalisable conclusions.

Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a critical examination and debate of the principal discoveries that resulted from the comprehensive interviews carried out across the course of this research. Most of the respondents had similar themes that emerged from their exploration of Millennials' thoughts, emotions and experiences. In order to fulfil the objective of the research of examining the relationship between brand equity and millennials' preferences for coffee shops in Ireland, this section will outline each objective and include some noteworthy personal comments from the respondents.

4.2 Research Objective 1

Research Objective 1:
To assess millennial tastes and impressions of coffee shops in Ireland.
Interview Themes:
Preference for Small vs. Big Coffee Chains
Corporate vs. Speciality Coffee Shops
Quality
Communities and Public Spaces
Variety and Easy Access

Figure 3: Research Objective 1 (Author 2024)

4.2.1 Preference for small vs. big coffee chains

The data gathering technique started with respondents expressing their opinions on coffee shops in Ireland, naming their favourite places, and summarising their daily or weekly coffee experiences. The reasoning behind the respondents thoughts were expressed by the comments below.

R1: <i>"I'm very picky with coffee, for me coffee needs to be taste, strong and easy to drink, personally, I prefer to go to Small coffee shop that I'm sure they will serve a good coffee".</i>
R2: <i>"When I think of a coffee place, I think of somewhere where you can go and be social. Coffee shops in Ireland dominated by international brands, still there is some nice small coffee shops, and I know some of them have become a lot more. I think my opinion on Irish coffee shops is they're not social spaces like I would expect the coffee place to be".</i>
R1: <i>"Prefers small, quality-focused coffee shops".</i>
R2: <i>"Favors places with a relaxing atmosphere and social opportunities like Nero's".</i>
R3: <i>"Prefers Cool Hands Coffee for their excellent oat milk cappuccinos".</i>
R4: <i>"Likes a specific coffee truck at her college for its quality coffee".</i>

Figure 4: Themes (Author 2024)

R1: <i>"the customer experience is important. if it is easy, if there is a huge queue like I just try to avoid".</i>
R2: <i>"I'm quite a chatty person. My usual routine would be going to say hi to one of the staff members. If it's one of them that I have a rapport with. I might have a catch up who might exchange stories. it's kind of like an office for me".</i>
R4: <i>"I like the ambience. Like the setup is really good. And they play really good music over there. So I like to just go there and sit and have coffee there".</i>

Figure 5: Themes (Author 2024)

The respondents strongly preferred smaller, independent coffee shops over bigger corporate chains such as Starbucks and Insomnia, according to the data. In contrast, some research indicates that Irish people, especially millennials, have been drawn to coffee shops such as Starbucks, since they are replacing traditional pubs with contemporary establishments that encourage socialising (Bielenberg, 2017; O'Connor, 2018). When asked about their daily or weekly coffee habits as well as their favourite coffee shops, respondents commonly mentioned this preference. These results are consistent with research showing that millennials choose speciality coffee shops due to their attraction to distinctive offerings like as cold brew and ready-to-drink options (MTPak Coffee, 2021). Even while this preference was most common, some respondents did note that they liked chains such as

Nero, suggesting that millennials had a variety of tastes, preferences and beliefs.

4.2.2 Corporate vs. Speciality Coffee Shops

The Irish coffee shop scene has displayed an uneven development pattern: big chains of coffee shops are spreading their presence while speciality coffee shops catering to niche markets and personal tastes are starting to emerge. Both of these characteristics have helped the market to flourish. In order to verify the information below, a manager from a major Irish coffee business responded.

R5: "I feel like in Ireland in the last 10 years, 5 to 10 years. There's been a lot happening in that space. But there's been two sides of it. There's been, there's more, a lot more. corporate companies setting up more stores in Ireland, there's more Insomnias, there's more Caffè Nero's, more Starbucks is all of that. And also, there's been a lot of specialty shops opening up and there's been more demand of popularity of specialty coffee shops, which I feel like you know, 1015 years ago, that wasn't a thing".

Figure 6: Themes (Author 2024)

The result is consistent with previous research, with the author emphasising that in Ireland's most populated towns and cities, one may find a mix of small coffee shops and well-known chains such as Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Insomnia, Caffè Nero, and 3fe. These facilities are popular meeting locations where people commonly do business or social activities while drinking coffee (O'Connor, 2018). Nonetheless, Ferreira *et al.*, (2021) notice that the emergence of huge coffee chains in urban areas is leading to a reduction in local coffee shops, which are valued for their unique character and community-oriented attitude. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest in speciality coffee in Ireland's coffee industry, as shown by Statista (2024) and Roddy's study (2019). In reality, there are no true or untrue statements since answers are based on perceptions. The goal of this inquiry was to grasp the perspective of a coffee chain management on the circumstance when comparing her enterprises to specialist coffee shops, and vice versa. A response would be great, however finding the speciality coffee shop manager or owner was difficult this time.

4.2.3 Quality

Subsequently the respondent's discussion regarding their preferences for coffee shops in Ireland. Participants articulated their opinions on the quality of the establishments they often frequent for coffee.

R1: *"For me coffee needs to be like perfect, those coffee shop in Ireland like insomnia, or Starbucks for me is like I don't like personally because for me, a taste of coffee makes to be like a strong and easy to drink, I prefer to go to Small coffee shop that I'm sure they will serve a good coffee".*

R4: *"My experience is mixed because they have been good and bad both because not all places have great coffee, but then some places have good ambiance. So I just like to go in for the ambiance. But the coffee is not good sometimes".*

Figure 7: Themes (Author 2024)

The above comments imply that varying millennials in Ireland have preferences about coffee establishments. For example, one participant prefers the flavour of coffee made by small, independent companies because they observe these enterprises as their version of perfection. Still another participant emphasises the ambiance over the taste of the coffee. This aligns with the notion that the tastes of millennials are shaped by their own dispositions towards certain products or situations (Anggraeni *et al.*, 2024). Sunarharum *et al.*, (2021) additionally find that consumer decisions are shaped on personal preferences; it is evident that consumers have a strong affinity for high-quality coffee. This debate emphasises the diversity of interests among millennials and the potential for differing perspectives between previous and contemporary studies.

4.2.4 Communities and Public Spaces

Respondents when asked about their thought on coffee shop in Ireland had in general a common sense about this subject, if they are going to a coffee shop, they expect to spend time in there, of course the 'to go' is a reality in such a hectic life but in general when going to those places millennials expect to have a nice atmosphere and more to be detailed below on discussion.

R2: *"I know from being in other places around the world those hours in a coffee shop tend to be quite long. In the evenings in Galway there is only really Nero's that has that, they close at 10:00 PM, so I kind of like it. It's not a positive view on Irish coffee stores because, I like to see it as an alternative place to go and hang out and relax. I think my opinion on Irish coffee shops is they're not social spaces like I would expect the coffee place to be".*

R3: *"I would say very personally that do I go there, and I really like the ambience of the coffee shop, the smell of the coffee, the way the arrangements like the seating arrangements are, or even the people, baristas who make the coffee".*

R4: *"I like the ambience. Like the setup is really good. And they play really good music over there. So I like to just go there and sit and have coffee there".*

Figure 8: Themes (Author 2024)

The comments above are some of the most articulate answers in the study, when it came discussing about their favourite coffee shops, most respondents followed a similar trend. For millennials, atmosphere is essential. Although some may also be concerned with flavour, quality, and other amenities, their motivation to attend coffee shops comes mostly from the environment. The setting is important whether they are working, spending time with friends and family, or just relaxing. In respondent 2 opinion, Ireland does not offer a social space from a coffee perspective in general when on the other hand, the other respondents go to their favourite place exactly for the felling they gave in that place. This is in line with past research since Sudarman (2023) notes that millennials prefer going to coffee shops with attractive pleasant surroundings, with modern furniture, nice lighting, and trendy interior design that fit for both leisure and professional use. Moreover, according to Rosenbaum *et al.*, (2007) and Saey & Foss (2016) customers identify public spaces as *"third places"* according to three primary definitions: practical, gathering, and homelike. While *"place-as-gathering"* as well as *"place-as-home"* operate both social and emotional demands, like creating connecting with others or overcoming loneliness, *"place-as-practical"* provides material needs such food and environment. A person's perspective and connection with these *"third places,"* which Starbucks has spread, may be shaped by past experiences. But against that idea, if there is something that all millennials worldwide have in common—their passion of coffee—it is This process of decision-making takes into consideration the general quality of a product

along with the transparency of its origins and manufacturing technique. That conversation shows that, in reality, there is still plenty to learn about millennials' tastes in coffee shops as disclosed so far.

4.2.5 Variety and Easy Access

It is evident that the diversity of coffee shops in Ireland is valued by millennials, which is consistent with other study results. The Irish Food Board, Bord Bia (2016), claims that the major drivers of the notable expansion in the coffee sector in Ireland have been younger customers who see it as a daily need.

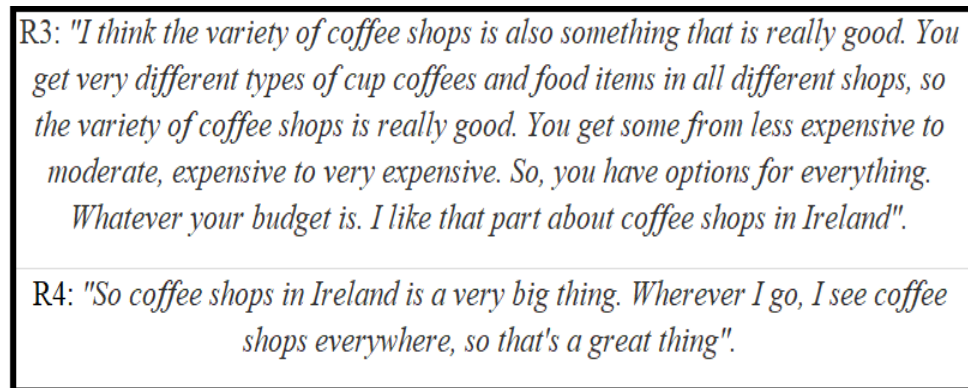


Figure 9: Themes (Author 2024)

These answers show that participants attract themselves to coffee shops offering a variety of coffee options, food, ambiance, and costs. They like how easily one may find a place to relax and sip coffee in Ireland. This is congruent with the results of Muflikh *et al.*, (2023) and Rahmah *et al.*, (2018), who claim that the number of coffee shops points to a rather competitive market. Coffee shops that want to be profitable and competitive have to give customer preferences first priority and adapt their products to fit their wants.

4.3 Research Objective 2

As the research advanced, new themes developed, which are discussed in relation to objective below.

Research Objective 2:
To find millennial preferences in relation to the surroundings and coffee shop ambiance.
Interview Themes:
Different Experiences and Choices at Favourite Coffee Shops
The Value of Environment and Ambiance
Characteristics of Coffee Shop Environments
Cosiness and Warmth
Millennials Experience
Marketing and Branding for the Millennials

Figure 10: Research Objective 2 (Author 2024)

4.3.1 Different Experiences and Choices at Favourite Coffee Shops

When questioned about their experiences at coffee shops in Ireland, participants categorically expressed their feelings, whether it towards tiny independent shops or larger franchises.

For the respondent one, the taste is the most important aspect from a coffee shop that is possible to have, if it tastes good, not really matter where the coffee come from. On the other hand, for the second respondent the taste is not important as much as its having the experience is expected, if the nice people will be found to have a chat, if is all settled as the place promise then the experience will be valuable. The same could be said by the respondent three and four, that choose to go to a coffee shop for their expected experience and do not feel attracted by a speciality shop that perhaps could have such a difference in blends and ambience. The results imply that those chosen millennials possess distinct opinions when describing their own experiences and represents contrary to which was already discovered in past research such mentioned by Gusniawan, Kumalasari & Azizah (2023), whilst say that the

flavour of coffee is an essential component in consumer preferences and may greatly impact the choices they make, in particular view of the wide range of coffee beverages offered. Nonetheless, the research endorsed by Muflikh et al., 2023 fits the view that several millennials prioritise convenience and utility with more conventional qualities like artisanal products and unique experiences in their hunt of the ideal coffee shop. Which also might be symbolised by the ease of the location chosen as preferred.

R1: the taste, most important, if it tastes good
R2: So, the people more than anything. Just how the place has been set up interior, how the interior of the place makes you feel. Like I obviously when I think about it, I don't go to Nero's for the flavour of the coffee there, because I already know where I can get better coffee. It's really just a space that I can go. If I go to a coffee store and I don't get that experience, it's not going to resonate in any positive meaningful way for me
R3: I think the experience of it, it's the consistency. Like it'll be the same as I know I'll get the same coffee. I don't have to think twice. I know it's this is going to be the same and everything the food menu, the ambience, the seating arrangement, everything is the same. Whereas when you go to a specialty coffee shop, you don't know what you'll be expecting. They have their own signature coffee blends, which add a different taste to the coffee.
R4: If I want to spend some time in the coffee shop, I want to sit, I want to talk to a friend, then I would prefer going to a bigger coffee shop, yeah, like cafe Nero, I really like the seating, the ambience. It's very old school, I like the chairs are really nice and the lighting. I prefer going there for the ambience more than the coffee.

Figure 11: Themes (Author 2024)

4.3.2 The Value of Environment and Ambiance

On the following the respondents express their thoughts on surroundings and ambiance while visiting a coffee shop.

R1: about the neighbour is like it has to be handy
R2: If it doesn't feel good, If it doesn't feel welcoming, I'm not going to stay, I'm going to want to get the coffee and just leave. So yeah, the ambience is very important. For me anyway. And the location is quite important. More important than I realise, really.
R3: So, if the ambience is good and like to sit there, then I might visit it again and again. That is one of the most important aspects for me to visit a coffee shop
R4: I would want to have, like, a coffee smell coming so that it feels more inviting to me. And then I feel like ordering that coffee and then some nice music is playing. So I feel like just waiting there and having the coffee. So, I would say that ambience and music and customer service is really important.

Figure 12: Themes (Author 2024)

The data indicate that convenience is an essential consideration in terms of environment and ambiance. For respondent one, if the coffee shop is on the way to work or home, it is ideal; in this case, the location must be close to daily necessities, which is consistent with Mehta & Bosson's (2009) and Chang & Spierings' (2023) findings when explaining that customers have diverse opinions on cultural variations; some are drawn to the convenience and attractiveness of chains, while others prefer tiny local enterprises such as specialised coffee shops. Local coffee shops are promoting a socially aware atmosphere and embracing the speciality coffee trend. Furthermore, when the nearby area is discussed, the other participants hold the same views; in this instance, they all believe that the atmosphere of a coffee shop is its most important component. If the surroundings are not what they had expected, they will leave without having had a good time. This matches Sudarman's (2023) analysis of the degree in which these establishments have evolved into pleasant, welcoming spaces, given that millennials are lured to the cosy, appealing atmosphere that coffee shops provide.

4.3.3 Characteristics of Coffee Shop Environments

Participants were asked what features or aspects of the coffee shop's environment they find the most interesting.

R1: Friendly and when you can see all the coffee beans, that particular case they offer you to buy coffee beans and they will grinder you the coffee, its unique.
R2: Mood and setting in, I think that's it for me. I think that's why Nero's wins me over most of the time. 'Cause, the interior and the lighting kind of set a nice, comfortable mood, and that just seems to be a little bit more inviting to me.
R3: How cosy it is.
R4: : The seating arrangement and the lights. I think the ambience.

Figure 13: Themes (Author 2024)

The respondent one prioritises the friendly and uniqueness of the coffee shop, also endorsed by Roddy (2019), when emphasis customers want outstanding unique coffee experiences with a variety of tastes. Respondents two and four agree on the environment and atmosphere; hence, this component is so significant that if a responder visits an unfamiliar place and it does not meet their expectations, they will not remain there. The cosiness, however, is what the third respondent thinks is most significant. All the aspects imposed by the respondents were found in previous research's when exploring millennial's preferences as stated by Sudarman (2023), millennials, in particular, have specific preferences for the kind of places they want to hang out. Such locations should have appealing features.

4.3.4 Comparing Cosiness and Warmth

As part of ongoing efforts to identify millennials' preferred coffee shops, a comparison was made between millennials' favourite coffee shops, in terms

of design and environment, and the prevalent coffee shops found on main streets.

<p>R2: <i>"It just reiterating that it does feel comfortable, it feels cosy, it feels welcoming, it feels homely. Whereas the others just seem to be quite sterile. You know that it seems to lack a character. It seems to lack that ambience that makes it feel like you want to stick around and might maybe that's OK, but I like to chill out there so".</i></p>
<p>R3: <i>"I'll always look for very specialty coffee place the first because I don't know. I have this perception that. Since they are only doing coffee at one particular shop and not have a chain it they would put more effort into it. So, it would be good as compared to say a retail chain where it's not the only place that you know that's making coffee".</i></p>
<p>R4: <i>"The quality of coffee, sometimes I feel that the tiny shops have better coffee than the bigger ones that get a lot of customers. So, I don't think they care a lot about the taste of their coffee because they are getting a lot of customers. But in the tiny shops they only have a few people like trusted people who they know that they will for sure come there and drink coffee. So, they focus more on coffee and the taste of the coffee rather than the ambience".</i></p>

Figure 14: Themes (Author 2024)

The findings show that each responder has a unique perspective on the elements they evaluate while picking a coffee shop. The respondent two considers its coffee shop, which is part of a chain, to be a really pleasant place to go, but all of the other little coffee shops lack individuality and are quite 'sterile', which is not appealing to its taste. On the other hand, the other respondents choose the speciality coffee shop to be their favourite. It is because they feel that if the establishment is small, such as a local coffee shop, it will focus on providing the best coffee possible, but large chains would not. Furthermore, respondent four believes that since the specialised coffee store is local and tiny, it will only have a few loyal customers. The researcher noted that some of the respondents were acquainted with the provided facts yet divorced from reality. The researcher presents the findings validated by Group

T.H. (2019), which stress millennials' taste for quality, ethically produced coffee and the atmosphere of coffee establishments; nevertheless, there is an alternate viewpoint that questions these assumptions. Some millennials choose pragmatism, ease, and cost above more philosophical or immersive characteristics, which are often stressed. This means a more detailed understanding of their purchase behaviours would be necessary.

4.3.5 Millennials Experience

To attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons why millennials favour one coffee shop over another, a comparable inquiry was directed to the manager of a coffee shop.

R5: *"Choice is a big one. Having options cause a lot of people nowadays have dietary requirements. A lot of people are celiac. A lot of people have not allergies or dairy allergies. Comfy seats are a big one. I think that's something that coffee shops need to invest in. More is having a wider variety of comfortable seating. Plugs is a big one. A lot of people want to go, and they want to work on their laptop for a couple hours or they just want to put their phone in. Having just like a good environment, a good atmosphere, not too loud, but not too quiet. I think a lot of millennials as well are very, as I said, are very aware of how staff seem to be treated. So at least for me and a lot of the people that I know, if we see that staff are not treated well somewhere, we're not going to go back there and give them more money. Good quality products as well for sure, but I think specifically with millennials, those would be some big ones affordability as well. It can't be too expensive".*

Figure 15: Themes (Author 2024)

The data reflects the manager's thoughts of millennial coffee shop preferences and highlights the key aspects that they feel appeal to this demographic. The manager begins by stating that millennials want a variety of options that will provide the greatest experience for the niche. That is, if the coffee shop can give a wide range of items, exceptional service is already something that is

expected to attract this generation. Thus, the ambience is extremely important and has been mentioned numerous times, and how the staff is treated is also a difference since the manager in this case believes that millennials appreciate interactions and care about others, and the respondent also believes that affordability should be constantly revised due to being expensive is not viewed favourably by some millennials and customers in general. Similarly, Tedjakumala *et al.*, (2022), stated that millennials are more attracted to social awareness. They are more concerned than ever with social justice, the environment, and ethical consumption. Fair trade, equality, inclusiveness, global warming, and corporate social responsibility are among their top priorities. They support companies and people who share these values with their money and online presence. Thus, Sunarharum *et al.*, (2021), endorse that critically, costumers dislike low-quality or inadequate coffee. The quality may impact customer consumption behaviour. Coffee intake and purchase behaviour are influenced by functional, taste, habit, culture, socialisation and more. All those factors are aligned to the manager's beliefs and thoughts about millennials behaviour towards coffee shop sector.

4.3.6 Marketing and Branding for Millennials

The last theme from objective two identified, was related to branding and how the manager incorporates the qualities and interests of millennial customers into their branding and marketing tactics. The following will be analysed further.

R5: "I think that companies need to invest in more avenues of marketing. I think that a lot of companies have good marketing. Insomnia has a good one but they're not putting it enough places, so they have the marketing in the store. They have the POS, they have screens, they have an Instagram or social media accounts that people can go and follow. And that seems to be where a lot of people stop. I think they would be a lot more successful if they invest in Instagram ads. If they invest in collaborations with other brands where you know, maybe say for example we serve OK here now insomnia is probably not going to partner with Oatley because Oatley is a really big company. But just as an example, if they had the opportunity to partner with Oatley, more people are going to be following Oatley on Instagram. While a lot of companies have really good graphic designers and marketing teams, they're not pushing their marketing enough".

Keeping in mind that, branding has been explained in various manners by different experts; Kotler & Armstrong (2003), say that a brand can be a word, phrase, image, picture, design, or a mix of these elements that helps people recognise a business's goods or services from those of its competitors. This aids customers in picking out what they desire. Moreover, Ajagbe *et al.*, (2014), emphasis that branding is an idea, is all about describing what a brand is: a picture that shows the traits, benefits, values, culture, and attitude of a company.

To put it simply, the manager's idea here is that a lot of businesses including its store are effectively marketing their products, but they are not doing it extensively enough. Their advertisements are available in shops, on social media, and perhaps a few extra places, but that is where it ends, as its seen daily. The manager's suggestion is that if they increased the number of individuals they reached in more locations through their advertising strategies, they may have more success. For instance, the manager says that they should spend money on Instagram advertisements to connect with more potential customers or partner with well-known brands to get greater exposure. They could utilise conventional types of promotion like TV commercials or hang posters in crowded downtown locations to pique public attention. Still, coffee shops have to use carefulness in this respect. They should be careful not to come across in their marketing as outdated or unpleasant. They should work with professionals who understand what is likely to be effective to prevent this. The manager in this case can only respond for its store and try to make efforts to deliver the best service to customers, especially millennials that was identified as carrying many different characteristics. This is significant related to past research's when; Agustin (2021), asserts that a coffee shop's design, as part of its branding, should be able to evoke an atmosphere and an experience that draw customers in and encourage them to come back often, all the while making it simple for them to complete purchases. Additionally, there must be a connection between the atmosphere and the standard and speed of service delivery.

4.4 Research Objective 3

The results, analysis, and discussion finish with study three, that examines the influence of brand equity, or a brand's strength and worth, on the choices made by millennials in Ireland while picking coffee shops. The study looks at how much millennials' choice of where to visit depends on the reputation, image, and brand of a coffee shop.

Research Objective 3:
To determine the impact of brand equity on the decisions of millennials when selecting coffee shops in Ireland.
Interview Themes:
Offerings
Price and Accessibility
Sustainability
Brand Perception
Overall Experience and Features

Figure 17: Research objectives 3 (Author 2024)

4.4.1 Offerings

This study intends to investigate other elements that can influence millennials' brand loyalty in order to find the fundamental causes of their inclination for coffee shops in Ireland. In this scenario, offerings may affect millennials' decisions to choose one shop over another. It's essential to remember that Respondent One follows certain dietary needs, and the variety of meals that meet their requirements is the primary factor drawing them in. This is not a unique case; many of customers look for special meal alternatives these days, and it plays a big role in their decision about where to go. On respondent 2 opinion rewards is certainly very attractive, plus, since the convenience to pay only throughout the app is making such an easy life, there is no reason to go to another chain. For respondent three, the human interaction is what make to come back to that coffee shop, if the barista makes good coffee but is not friendly, there is no motivation to be back there. Interesting, all the factors are repeated over and over again, in different type of question the respondents in

their own experiences are somehow related to the previous research when confirming that, Roddy (2019) and Statista (2024), millennials need distinctive, superior coffee experiences that allow them to sample a variety of tastes. Tedjakumala *et al.*, (2022) state that this group is characterised by a range of values; menu variations, prices, and product image, in addition to pricing (Muflikh *et al.*, 2023). Millennial consumers by putting efficiency, sustainability, and providing distinctive customer experiences at the top of the priority list (Cone Communications CSR survey, 2017). According to Han & Ryu (2009), these elements may include the quality of food preparation, friendliness, taste, neatness, service, comfort, and ambiance.

<p>R1: <i>"The type of meal they have, I'm vegetarian and I don't drink cow milk, for me, if they have the special meal, variety of meals, for me that's important".</i></p>
<p>R2: <i>"For sure reward cards and stuff like that. And I know with Nero's they have the app as well for the rewards cards and I can just, I don't even have to use like a credit card or a credit card app or Apple, I can open up the Nero's app itself. And I can set up my credit card with it. And whenever I go there, I just pay with QR code on their app and it's all seamless, so there's no extra face ID or anything and that adds loyalty stamps, and then I get my vouchers and stuff. So, like just it, it makes it a very enticing package for me for repeat sales".</i></p>
<p>R3: <i>"I think the friendliness of the staff in the coffee shop that affects like if I have a good experience, it's like baristas or the waiters, they play a very important role if they are not friendly then I will probably never go to that coffee shop again. Even if I really like the coffee there. So yeah, I think that is very important to me. Human interaction".</i></p>

Figure 18: Themes (Author 2024)

4.4.2 Price and Accessibility

The respondents in this section are still emphasising the variables that affect their decision to choose a certain coffee shop over another. Clearly important factors in their decision-making process are cost and convenience.

<p>R4: " The cost, I would say like if it's too costly, I will not buy it. So I will just look on the menu and I will just check what's the cheapest one and then I will go for the cheapest. And then if I know a certain coffee taste good, I will just go for that one. I will not try something else. I will just go for the one I know. So yeah, cost is a big thing".</p>
<p>R4: "If it's convenient, like if I'm just there and if I'm in the city, for example, all these big brands are very famous in the city. So, I will just go there because it's convenient. I don't have to travel to go to a coffee shop, so I will just go wherever I see a coffee shop, so I won't travel and go to a special coffee shop. So, I think travelling or convenience is what I see in a coffee shop".</p>
<p>R5: "Well, I think people have less time for one. I think people work a lot and they do a lot. You know, people work, and they might be taking courses. They work or they have kids. They even, you know, hobbies. People have a wide range of hobbies these days. So because people have less time, we're living a very fast-paced life, getting lunch on the go, getting a coffee on the go, not having time or really. The time to kind of invest in a coffee set up at home. The convenience of going to a coffee shop is gonna be really important. Also, probably there is influence from like the US and other places. You see a lot about coffee culture online. You see a lot about; I think it probably originated with people seeing stuff about Starbucks and all these big coffee chains in the US and that's to our own culture now. What else? Yeah, I think those ones would be the big ones. It is to do with the companies now catering to what people want and their lifestyles. But I think two of the biggest ones would be time and and convenience. And influence from other cultures and other countries".</p>

Figure 19: Themes (Author 2024)

Respondent four had concerns over the price of the coffee shop. They believe that their potential to experience new things is limited if an environment is too pricey. Aligned to Firmansyah *et al.*, (2019), found that for millennials, it's important that things are affordable and genuine. It's affordable if the price is fair for what they can pay. Being authentic, if the coffee shop has something special and unique to give. Cost and originality are the main things that they look at when picking a coffee shop. Still with respondent four which similarly to the others are very into convenience, they explained how convenience play an essential role in their lives. Corresponding to Mehta & Bosson (2009); Chang & Spierings (2023) some people like tiny local businesses, such as speciality coffee shops, to be more individualistic, while others find chains to be way more appealing and convenient overall.

4.4.3 Sustainability

The literature review mentioned sustainability in relation to millennials. In light of this link, the researcher thought it was necessary to investigate sustainability further in order to better comprehend the preferences of millennials and the engagement on this trend.

Surprisingly, and opposite to the existing papers; Goldman Sachs (2024), when claims that speciality coffee shops catering to Millennials' broader values of social and environmental responsibility, and offering artisanal brews and advocating for sustainable development, are appealing to them. Furthermore, Cone Communications CSR report, (2017), affirming that putting effectiveness, sustainability, and providing distinctive customer experiences first, coffee firms may effectively cater to Millennial consumers and foster brand loyalty. According to the responses, sustainability is not essential in a coffee shop setting. They either think that adopting sustainable practices would be too expensive and may result in increased coffee costs, or they do not identify sustainability at all with coffee shops. It reflects the lack of information costumers; said millennials have about coffee shops or sustainability, which perhaps would be more correspondent to the next research that says; the coffee sector is progressively emphasising ethical sourcing and sustainability, consumers are more aware of the social and environmental consequences of coffee production and are insisting on greater ethical standards from coffee growers.

<p>R1: <i>"In coffee shop, I'm not big on sustainability, in the morning time I'm grumpy mood. I just want my coffee and it doesn't matter if they are sustainable or not".</i></p>
<p>R2: <i>" No, it doesn't. Sustainability used to be something that I did. Like, come into my consideration in purchasing, but now I feel like everything's kind of greenwashed, so it now kind of washes over me and maybe it's also just a bit of sustainability fatigue. But I don't see others really picking up on that trend maybe because it costs more or something, if I knew that the shops I go would had a fully biodegradable coffee cup, yeah, I would definitely pay attention to that and I'd probably feel more proud knowing that the business I frequent is doing something positive, but it wouldn't really change my perception or purchasing habit with where I go to".</i></p>
<p>R3: <i>"I don't think that I look at sustainability from a coffee perspective. I would also assume that could be added to the cost as well? So, it might be a bit expensive for me but yeah, I think that's a very good, positive impact that a coffee shop can have if they are very sustainable in their daily businesses".</i></p>
<p>R4: <i>"I don't think about sustainability at all, if I'm going to a coffee shop like I don't think about sustainability. I don't even know if a coffee shop is sustainable or not".</i></p>

Figure 20: Themes (Author 2024)

4.4.4 Brand Perception

The brand perception theme emerged from the question; how do your coffee shop/brand preferences reflect your personal opinions and beliefs as a millennial consumer?

R1: <i>"I support small businesses and prefer taste coffee".</i>
R2: <i>"Probably because of a fatigue of all the other struggles as being a millennial. You know, you've got so much to worry about these days as a millennial, do you have time to worry about if your coffee cup has been made to be biodegradable or if the farm that the beans coming from is sustainable? We like those things, but we are fatigued. So, I don't really know how to answer the question as a millennial, because I've never really identified as a millennial. But I do think a lot of the things I've probably covered".</i>
R3: <i>"One of the important factors that I can look at is Specialty Coffee as a thing because you know the whole experience of going and you know the barista be getting their own style on the same coffee as a cappuccino is very simple. But if the baristas give their own trademark or their own signature to cappuccino to it, it adds to the overall experience of it. So I think that adds to the whole experience. Compared to the retail coffee shops".</i>
R4: <i>"I'm just drinking coffee. I'm not thinking about this. I'm happy that coffee personally reflect you or someone. So, I like if I'm alone and having coffee, I like the whole, you know, the aesthetic part. Like being aesthetic while having coffee, just like take it all instead, maybe taking a picture or just like walking with the coffee looking here, looking there, just like being in my own world. So I like that aesthetic, just to take a picture to look aesthetic".</i>
R5: <i>"I know a lot of people and hang out with a lot of people as well. People are more interested in types of coffee and trying new places and supporting small businesses as well, is a big thing. On the one hand, people use the corporate coffee shops for convenience and food as well, I think is a big thing in those places. But also I know that people are very interested in supporting smaller businesses and supporting Irish businesses".</i>

Figure 21: Themes (Author 2024)

Considering the tastes and choices made by millennial customers, the concept of "Brand Perception" became clear as an important component of their brand and coffee shop selections. This subject shows how millennials' own values, attitudes, and beliefs form their impressions of many businesses, therefore influencing their buying choice. The respondents this time have distinctive answers, each of them either support small business, think the trend now is about speciality coffee, or believe that the millennials have so much to do, to think, so many and different struggles that even think as a millennial sound really hard. The last manager and respondent express its opinion generally but mentioning small business, also how costumers go to chains for convenience. The respondent four mentioned the aesthetic aspect, which strongly is in

according to past research when describing millennials and the Internet media factor. This gives grounding to Tedjakumala *et al.*, (2022), this group stands out for its diverse set of ideals, adept use of social media and technology, key concepts in their activities, and unique perspectives on social and economic issues. Bucatã (2015), indicates that this generation participates more than previous generations. Supporting social causes and environmentally conscious enterprises is their speciality. Millennials like coffee shops because of their comfortable environment. Modern furniture, great lighting, and excellent interior design are typical in these areas. This creates a pleasant or working environment. To meet millennials', need for a digital presence and the opportunity to express themselves, many coffee shops now provide a pleasant environment for snapping photographs or publishing on Instagram and Tik Tok, Sudarman (2023).

4.4.5 Overall Experience and Features

Finally, the following demonstrate the best reflections about; what makes the millennials to choose one coffee shop over another.

<p>R1: <i>"A small business. Cozy place to be and taste coffee"</i></p>
<p>R2: <i>"Definitely the ambience and even just going back to that, Starbucks actually does a pretty good job of like creating a good atmosphere. But I just feel that it feels quite commercial. Everything down to the tables and the colour that gets used in Starbucks is quite particular to branding efforts. Like Nero's, just feels a little more character and authenticity to it, whereas Starbucks has just got that like. In Nero's I do get a very personalised experience and they know and be like, oh, you want that Americano with this, this and that. And it's like, yeah, you know, my order. I don't even have to ask. I feel like a connection there now to the place. No, they already know what I want, which is cool".</i></p>
<p>R3: <i>"Coffee first and foremost, the atmosphere, the ambience and stuff. Friendliness and food combination offers".</i></p>
<p>R5: <i>" People are becoming more interested in coffee in general. Compared to before the kind of coffee boom in Ireland has happened. People are pickier with their coffee. I think like for example at Insomnia actually the things that they brought in was putting in those little stickers by the door and the little signs that say that they're selling Irish products. So that would be one thing, making sure that your advertising that you're selling Irish products, that you're an Irish company. I mean, one of the big questions you're gonna ask, well, at least this is one of the questions that I ask myself when I'm getting a coffee is, are you gonna go with a more specialty shop or are you gonna go with a chain? Now, once you've made that decision, because I think that insomnia can't offer what small coffee shops offer. If someone is specifically looking for a specialty coffee shop, a small, you know. Like, you know, one iteration coffee shop, they're not gonna go with Insomnia, obviously, it is about the taste, what you are looking for".</i></p>
<p>R5: <i>"I'm not sure, to be honest. It's it because it could go either way. If the economy gets worse, people may stop buying coffee out so much they might not have the money to buy cakes and sandwich and a coffee on a Saturday for example. They might not have that kind of money. They might be doing other things that are cheaper or doing things at home, meeting up in people's houses. And then my other thoughts were thinking of, are people going to move more towards smaller specialty coffee shops because that that is something that's on people's minds or? There's so much going on in the world. Are people going to move? Are people just not gonna care anymore and just be so tired and stuff that they're just gonna spend their money wherever is convenient? So it's an interesting time. I do think a lot is going to change, but I'm not sure how it's gonna change. It's very difficult to predict at the moment. Things are so up in the air"</i></p>

This chapter has looked at a variety of observations, questions, and insights on the preferences of millennials and the factors that influence their decision to patronise a certain coffee shop over another. It has looked at what motivates them and what appeals to them the most. All things considered; it is evident that the setting is a major factor in their decisions. Even though, some still might go for taste, others looking for the most aesthetic drink aligned with place. In fact, there are many layers until really have a concrete answer, it might not exist, it might be a topic for future research. What is possible to affirm, is that the overall insight when in attempt to deep understand the millennials choice, also was found in the past papers as; Mehta & Bosson (2009), who provide an example of "*third place*," which often consists of a variety of facilities such general stores, coffee shops, bars, restaurants, community centres, and small businesses. Research on the coffee industry shows that, despite changes, the coffee shop has managed to survive and grow beyond its initial function as a "*third place*." Moreover, Chonchúir, (2024), discovered that having coffee with friends is a typical social activity and that many individuals choose relaxed small cafés over packed bars. Younger individuals tend to think coffee is intelligent and intellectual. Furthermore, having a cup of coffee may provide each of us the much-needed break or moment of reflection that we all need in these busy times. As according to Sudarman (2023); Anggraeni *et al.*, (2024), millennials have unique characteristics and perspectives. All the mentioned studies wrap up the insights that these inquiries brought up to this research.

The findings, analysis and discussion in this section have led to a selection of recommendations for academia and coffee businesses, which will be delivered and outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This research aimed at “examining the relationship between brand equity and the preferences of the Millennial for coffee shops in Ireland”. This study has conducted a thorough literature review and utilised a strong methodological framework centred around the research onion model proposed by (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Through the implementation of qualitative research techniques, the study has acquired useful knowledge into the intricate factors that influence the preferences of Millennial consumers in the Irish coffee shop business.

This research highlights the crucial significance of brand equity in influencing the decision-making process of Millennials when it comes to choosing products or services. Brand equity is comprised of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty, as defined by Aaker (1992) and Keller (1993). This study demonstrates the significance of brand equity's elements in shaping the preferences of Millennials when selecting coffee shops. For instance, the recruitment of Millennial consumers was demonstrated to be significantly influenced by perceived quality and brand recognition. This emphasises the need of having recognisable and especially high-quality products or services and on findings was possible to see that millennials are very attractive by those elements as mentioned by the respondent fifth during the interviews and also the thoughts from the other respondents.

The preference of millennials for coffee shops is greatly influenced through their social and personal experiences as it was mentioned many times on the findings, especially when expressing why and what have their attention at most in coffee shops, being ambience the biggest element for them. The current generation, known for its hunger for genuineness, societal accountability, and in some cases environmental consciousness, Smith (2011) prefers to choose coffee establishments that uphold these principles. The results indicate that coffee establishments that prioritise a few aspects already

mentioned by millennials are more inclined to attract and retain the commitment of those customers. This is consistent with most of the wider body of research on preferences, which suggests an increasing inclination towards environment and nicely ambience for taking photos or posting experiences on social media, like Instagram and Tik Tok. This generation is more likely to choose face-to-face communication over social media, stated (Sudarman, 2023).

Based on the interpretivist approach Saunders *et al.*, (2009); Saunders & Tosey (2012); and Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) this research recognises that individual views and experiences differ considerably, resulting in an extensive and diverse comprehension of consumer choices. There is no right or wrong answer but all about millennials point of view as they have different experiences and perspectives towards coffee shops establishment.

Finally, this study critically gives useful advice for coffee shop owners or managers looking to improve their brand equity along with connect to Millennial customers. Coffee shops can enhance their ability to draw in and keep this important population by prioritising effectiveness, genuineness, moral standards, and strong digital interaction. This dissertation makes a valuable contribution to the overall discussion on brand equity and costumer choice. It provides both theoretical as well as practical benefits to both academics and practitioners, which will be expanded on.

5.2 Recommendations

The dissertation's results lead to many recommendations for improving the comprehension of the relationship between brand equity and Millennial preferences for coffee shops in Ireland. Furthermore, these suggestions consider the methods used in this study and provide future strategies to further enhance the acquired insights.

To increase brand recognition, coffee shops ought to support focused marketing strategies that make use of both conventional and online channels. It is important to highlight interesting information that speaks to Millennial ideals, which include community commitment, integrity, alongside

sustainability. Connecting with Millennial consumers depends on using social media channels—especially Instagram and TikTok. These outlets might be utilised to underline the unique qualities of the brand as well as the services of the coffee shop.

Attracting Millennial patrons of the coffee shop depends much on its inside design. Coffee shops should have a warm, inviting, and visually beautiful environment that promotes relaxing and interaction with others. Offerings like complimentary Wi-Fi, cosy seats, and eye-catching interior décor may improve the whole experience. Even if the large chains are already concentrating on it, coffee shops and especially the small speciality coffee shops in particular ought to consider this advice since it is still inconsistent.

Coffee shops need to be aware of changing customer tastes along with market dynamics to remain relevant and interesting. This may be achieved by doing frequent market research studies. Feedback surveys, group discussions are a few examples of this. Keeping up with adjustments to Millennial tastes may help coffee businesses develop and adapt successfully.

The qualitative approach applied to this research, which was based on the Research Onion model by Saunders *et al.*, (2009) yielded comprehensive, specific insights towards the preferences of Millennials. Despite this, future studies, might gain benefit with improvements on the methodological research.

A better understanding may come from mixed methods combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Quantitative studies may validate the qualitative findings as it aims to present statistical generality (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Lund, 2012).

Furthermore, a better knowledge of the cultural impacts on customer decisions and perceived value can help one to evaluate the variations in preferences among Irish Millennials as well as those from other nations. Finally, this study aims at identifying the specific reasons why millennials opt for one coffee shop over another.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Sample Millennials Interviews

Millennials:

Q.1 Tell me about your thoughts on coffee shops in Ireland?

Q.2 What is your favourite, why is that your favourite?

Q.3 Tell me about your daily/weekly experience getting your coffee there...

BACK UP: Q. Can you define the most essential components of your coffee shop experience? This will be necessary if you feel they haven't answered the last element of Q3 (how they impact your selection of coffee shops?)

Q.4 How different are your experiences at your favourite coffee shop from those at other chains or brands? Why do you find your favourite coffee shop unique? What is so special?

Q.5 How essential do you consider the surroundings and ambiance while visiting a coffee shop?

Q. 6 Which features/characteristics of the coffee shop's environment do you find most interesting?

Q.7 Any other factors impact your coffee shop preferences; how do they affect your commitment to a certain brand?

Q.8 How does sustainability affect your coffee-drinking preferences, and how does it influence your perception of a coffee shop's brand?

Q.9 Can you provide examples of brands you know that do this well or poorly?

Q.10 How does your favourite coffee shop's style and atmosphere compare to well-known high-street coffee shops?

Q. 11 Overall, what makes you choose one coffee shop over another?

Q.12 How do your coffee shop/brand preferences reflect your personal opinions and beliefs as a millennial consumer?

***Is perhaps anything we haven't covered that you'd want to add or discuss? ***|

Figure 23: Sample Millennials Interviews (Author 2024)

Appendix 2 – Sample Manager Interview

Owners/managers: tell me your age, your years of experience in the field

Q.1 What are your thoughts of the present situation of coffee shops in Ireland?

Q.2 What specific patterns and insights have you observed in the preferences of Millennials for coffee establishments?

Q.3 How do you adapt to these changes?

Q.4 What are the key elements driving the popularity of coffee shops in Ireland?

Q.6 Why should anyone choose your shop instead of another?

Q.7 How crucial is it for you to create a pleasant atmosphere while operating your coffee shop?

Q.8 What do you believe is the perfect experience or environment for Millennials, what do they seek for?

Q.9 How do you incorporate the qualities and interests of millennial customers into your branding and marketing tactics? (*branding: actions you take to build a certain image of your company*)

Q.10 How have well-known coffee chains affected your branding and business practices?

Q.11 What role does sustainability play in the activities of your company other than the manufacturing of coffee? (How do you let your customers know about these efforts?)

Q.12 What are the important aspects you consider while developing and sustaining brand equity for your coffee shop?

Q.13 What are your predictions for the future?

***Is perhaps anything we haven't covered that you'd want to add or discuss? ***

Figure 24: Sample Manager Interview (Author 2024)