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The effect of product-, organisational-, individual-, and environmental-level factors on brand loyalty in the SME sector: a systematic literature review

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Abstract: By adopting a transparent and replicable approach, this study seeks to improve the quality of assessment and scope of extant studies on factors driving brand loyalty in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), reinforcing the empirical base for future research and providing actionable insights for practitioners aiming to execute well-rounded brand loyalty strategies. A systematic literature review of 25 articles retrieved from Scopus and ProQuest databases was conducted. Packaging and quality influence brand loyalty at the product level. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices, value creation, and loyalty programmes drive brand loyalty at the organisational level. At the individual level, consumer hedonic shopping and trust predict brand loyalty, while store ambience acts as a key environmental variable. The study suggests a comprehensive marketing strategy integrating multiple-level factors to effectively boost brand loyalty in SMEs.

Keywords: product-level factors; organisational-level factors; individual-level factors; environmental-level factors; brand loyalty; small and medium enterprise sector; SME sector; customer loyalty; product quality; hedonic shopping; product packaging; value co-creation; systematic literature review.

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1 Introduction

Digital transformation, environmental concerns and regulatory pressures have significantly shaped today's corporate world (Tian, 2024; Xu et al., 2023; Wang, 2024), prompting businesses to rethink their operational strategies (Ghosh, 2023; Kraus et al., 2022; Wamba and Queiroz, 2023). Competition has intensified in practically all industries, with firms facing threats from local rivals, agile startups and global entrants facilitated by digital networks (Islami et al., 2020; Nayyar, 2017). Intense rivalry driven by market liberalisation and technological advancement characterises the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector (Wang, 2024; Xu et al., 2023). While definitions vary across countries and regions, the World Bank defines SMEs as enterprises employing fewer than 300 employees, generating annual income not exceeding US\$15 million and having a total asset base of not more than US\$15 million (World Bank Group, 2019; Zavatta, 2008). The growing ease of international commerce and the pervasiveness of e-trade have lowered entry barriers and allowed more players to access diverse industry segments (Keelson et al., 2024; Pires and Soares, 2019), adding another layer of competition in the SME sector by introducing international enterprises into local markets (Azeem and Kotey, 2021). In addition to traditional firms, SMEs now compete with global corporations, which often possess superior resources and enjoy broader market reach (Pires and Soares, 2019).

Amid this mounting entrepreneurial rivalry, SMEs must build brand loyalty in their specific market niches to gain a competitive advantage and achieve long-term sustainability (Kizi and Du, 2025; Pereira et al., 2025; Rubio-Andrés et al., 2024). Digital marketing trends, notably influencer engagement, personalised advertising and data-driven customer experiences, have significantly reshaped how SMEs develop and sustain brand loyalty (Kishor, 2022; Pandey and Srivastava, 2025; Pereira et al., 2025). While digital interfaces provide SMEs with cost-effective tools to reach and engage customers, they also amplify expectations for seamless, consistent and value-rich brand interactions (Raymond and Theodore, 2025; Sharma and Paudel, 2025). The immediacy and transparency afforded by these platforms can elicit positive and negative consumer perceptions, compounding the challenge of sustaining loyalty in a hypercompetitive and dynamic business environment (Bacik et al., 2025; Hidayat and Ambarwati, 2024). Examining how SMEs build brand loyalty in this volatile environment, shaped by digital and conventional drivers, is imperative in developing an effective marketing strategy.

Varying conceptualisations of brand loyalty have emerged, with a growing body of marketing literature stressing consistent and repeat purchases, customer referrals, reliability, trust and emotional connection (Hwang et al., 2023; Rather, 2023; Shafiee et al., 2022). Holmes et al. (2020) conceptualised brand loyalty as a steadfast customer behaviour distinguished by strong resistance to switching from a firm to competitors. It

serves as an indicator of trust and fidelity to a brand and represents the core of brand equity, an essential concept in marketing that measures customer-brand relations (Bae and Kim, 2023). Akoglu and Özbek (2021) depicted consistent purchasing of preferred brands and reduced probability of switching brands as fundamental markers of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty also refers to a measure of brand-customer connection, minimising customers' propensity to switch to other brands in response to changes in price and other attributes (Trinh and Dawes, 2020). Oliver (1999) perceived brand loyalty from two distinct dimensions: attitudinal and behavioural. Attitudinal loyalty entails a strong repurchase intent, readiness to pay premium prices, and the tendency to recommend the brand through word-of-mouth, while behavioural loyalty constitutes a firm commitment to regularly repurchasing from a preferred enterprise (Oliver, 1999; Pandiangan et al., 2021).

Brand loyalty is increasingly acknowledged as a critical driver of consumer behaviour and a vital asset for businesses of varying sizes seeking to gain a competitive advantage in today's highly complex and competitive environment (Bisschoff and Els, 2023; Kim and Zhao, 2014). However, brand loyalty holds particular significance for SMEs due to their limitations in budget, market reach and brand visibility, making it challenging to compete effectively in the market (Bambale et al., 2023; Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2017; Adejuwon and Lawal, 2022). Brand loyalty leads to sustained customer retention, minimises marketing costs and enhances business resilience (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011; Pamfilie and Croitoru, 2018). In addition to making repeat purchases, loyal customers serve as brand ambassadors, enabling SMEs to grow organically through word-of-mouth referrals and positive reviews (Lawer and Knox, 2006; Rosi and Ekasari, 2023). This significance positions brand loyalty as not merely a marketing goal but a strategic imperative for long-term success and profitability in the SME sector (Lacey and Morgan, 2009; Shailesh and Reddy, 2016).

Jadhav et al. (2023), Tanford et al. (2016), Foroudi et al. (2018), Bae and Kim (2023), Sasmita and Suki (2015) and Torres et al. (2022) examined the influence of multi-level factors on consumer loyalty toward a brand. Within the SME sector, several factors, such as price, customer service, product appeal, customer emotions, promotions and social influence, shape behaviour and drive brand loyalty (Fernandes et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Mutsikiwa and Eniola, 2024). The complex interplay of factors driving brand loyalty in this context can be grouped into four broad levels: product, organisational, individual and environmental (Anggara et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaitė, 2023; Rabbarts, 2024; Tyrväinen et al., 2023).

Product-related factors have been shown to cultivate brand loyalty (Alkhawaldeh and Eneizan, 2018; Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaite, 2023; Zhang, 2019). Product reliability, quality and design attract consumers and encourage recurrent purchases (Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaite, 2023). Firms that offer unique or competitive products have a better propensity to form strong emotional links with consumers, significantly influencing their satisfaction and loyalty (Aliyanti, 2025; Ismail, 2017; Zhang, 2019). Product value, which harmonises price and performance, substantially drives customer gratification and loyalty, especially in highly competitive markets where multiple firms target a specific clientele (Alkhawaldeh and Eneizan, 2018; Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaite, 2023).

From an organisational standpoint, several operational and strategic factors shape consumer purchase behaviours and brand loyalty in SMEs (Allender and Richards, 2012; Empen et al., 2015). Leading organisational factors associated with brand loyalty include price, promotions, brand positioning and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (Empen et al., 2015). Strategic pricing strategy improves brand trust while a properly designed promotional campaign raises brand visibility, reinforcing consumer attachment to the brand (Allender and Richards, 2012; Empen et al., 2015). By leveraging customer appraisal data, enterprises create customised experiences that meet or exceed market expectations, encouraging repeat purchases and long-lasting loyalty (Mao, 2010).

At the individual or customer level, multiple factors interact to influence brand loyalty (Jonathan and Rodhiah, 2023; Rahman et al., 2024; Smith, 2019). Personality traits like brand consciousness can amplify repeat purchasing tendencies among consumers (Jonathan and Rodhiah, 2023). Emotional connections, such as joy, trust and affection toward a brand, play an integral role in shaping brand loyalty by encouraging repeat purchasing and long-term relationships (Loureiro et al., 2012).

Environmental or situational factors, such as social influence and store attributes, influence customer loyalty toward a brand (Anggara et al., 2023; Low et al., 2018). Economic conditions, social impact and technological changes can alter consumer behaviour and attitudes toward consumption (Casidy et al., 2022; Mogaji and Jain, 2022). These factors often interact with internal brand experiences, either reinforcing brand loyalty or prompting brand switching (Khamitov et al., 2019).

While existing literature recognises the multifaceted influence of product-, organisational-, individual- and environmental-level factors on brand loyalty, it lacks a cohesive, integrative framework that holistically captures the dynamic interplay across different levels (Anggara et al., 2023; Allender and Richards, 2012; Empen et al., 2015; Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaite, 2023). Many studies underscore isolated variables or adopt narrow contexts, such as single industries or large organisations, thereby restricting the broader applicability of their findings, especially to resource-constrained settings like SMEs. This gap highlights the need for a contemporaneous and comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesise and evaluate existing research to provide a nuanced purview on the multidimensional antecedents of brand loyalty in the SME sector. By adopting a transparent and replicable approach, this study seeks to improve the quality of assessment and scope of extant studies, reinforcing the empirical base for future research and providing actionable insights for practitioners aiming to execute well-rounded brand loyalty strategies.

2 Review methodology

2.1 Study design

The study adopted the SLR framework proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003) to synthesise published data. This protocol is widely acknowledged as a foundational approach to conducting SLRs in social sciences and related disciplines (Andreini and Bettinelli, 2017;

Imran et al., 2022; Pittaway et al., 2004; Silva and Moreira, 2019). Scholars favour this method due to its emphasis on transparency, reproducibility and methodological rigour, which are pivotal to producing an extensive and unbiased synthesis of available literature (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015). Additionally, Tranfield et al.'s (2003) protocol offers a structured, multi-layered process, including planning, conducting and reporting, enabling researchers to locate, appraise and integrate relevant studies into the review process. Ungaro et al. (2024) considered this method ideal for evaluating multiple and diverse publications, uncovering theoretical patterns and gaps and enhancing outcome validity and broad replicability. Tranfield et al.'s (2003) framework was preferred in this study due to the fragmented and multidisciplinary nature of the literature on brand loyalty in the SMEs context (Foroudi et al., 2018; Bae and Kim, 2023; Sasmita and Suki, 2015). Adopting this protocol further augmented the academic and practical relevance of the review process.

Tranfield et al.'s (2003) framework underscored formulating research questions, defining the scope, identifying, screening and selecting sources, and reporting and analysing findings. In conducting the SLR, this study followed these iterative phases. Moher et al.'s (2009) widely known Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guideline was used to present a visual summary of the search, screening and selection processes.

2.2 Research question formulation

This paper aimed to enrich the current scholarship on the factors that influence brand loyalty by answering the following research question: *what are the product-, organisational-, individual- and environmental-level factors that influence brand loyalty in the SME sector?*

2.2.1 Scope of the study

Tranfield et al.'s (2003) framework emphasised using the Context, Intervention, Mechanism and Outcome (CIMO) logic when defining the scope of a systematic literature review. 'Context' refers to the setting in which the intervention occurs, 'intervention' implies the specific action, policy or strategy executed to drive change, 'M' denotes the reasoning underpinning how the intervention produces outcomes, and 'O' signifies the effects or change emanating from the intervention (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). The CIMO logic was used to define the scope as follows: In the context of SMEs (C), this study explored how factors at the organisational, individual, environmental and product levels (I) spark mechanisms such as customer satisfaction, trust and perceived value (M) to influence the outcome of brand loyalty (O). Timelines were confined to 2010 and 2025 to capture research trends over the past one-and-a-half decades, a period marked by significant global transformations in technology, entrepreneurship and international crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.2 Search strategy and data sources

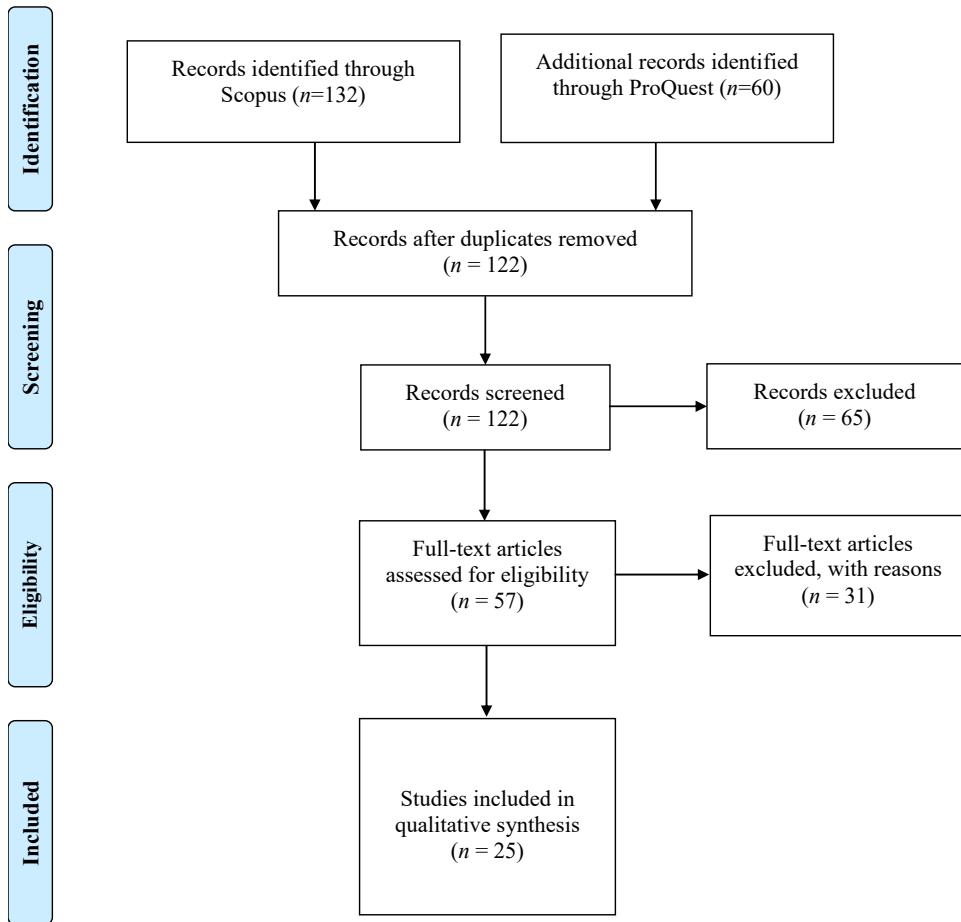
During this phase, the SLR process involves designing appropriate search strings and choosing relevant databases (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). A combination of keywords with Boolean operators was utilised in this study to locate relevant publications from past literature. The following keywords were used in the search process: (organisational, individual, environmental and product level factors AND brand loyalty AND SME). Scopus and ProQuest databases were selected for the search process due to their broader coverage and inclusivity of journals compared to other databases (Ansari and Raza, 2020; Dworak, 2012; Harnegie, 2013). The search was undertaken between 28 March and 16 April 2025, and 132 articles from Scopus and 60 from ProQuest were retrieved. Seventy publications appearing in both databases were eliminated from the list, resulting in 122 publications entering the screening process.

2.2.3 Selection criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to ensure the selected studies align with the study’s scope (see Table 1). Peer-reviewed articles were preferred over other sources due to their rigorous evaluation by subject-matter experts before publication, ensuring reliability (Gough et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). The study prioritised articles published in English due to their dominance in scientific communication globally, particularly in disciplines such as the social sciences and management, making them accessible and widely indexed in academic databases, including Scopus, ProQuest and Web of Science (Pieper and Puljak, 2021). Sixty-five (65) papers that did not explore factors at the four illustrated levels and their association with brand loyalty in the SME sector were eliminated. The next phase entailed reading the full texts of the remaining 57 articles. Fifteen (15) papers published outside the 2010 to 2025 scope were removed. Additionally, 11 papers and 6 other publications were eliminated because they were non-peer-reviewed journal articles and not published in English, respectively. The remaining 25 papers were included in the final systematic review. Figure 1 summarises the selection process followed in this study.

Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>
Include marketing factors in SMEs at the organisational, individual, environmental or product level factors and brand loyalty	Not focusing on the link between organisational-, individual-, environmental-, or product-level factors and brand loyalty
Published between 2010 and 2025	Published before 2010
Authored in English	Authored in other languages
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-peer-reviewed publications (i.e., theses, reviews, grey literature and non-peer-reviewed journal articles)

Figure 1 The flow diagram of the selection process

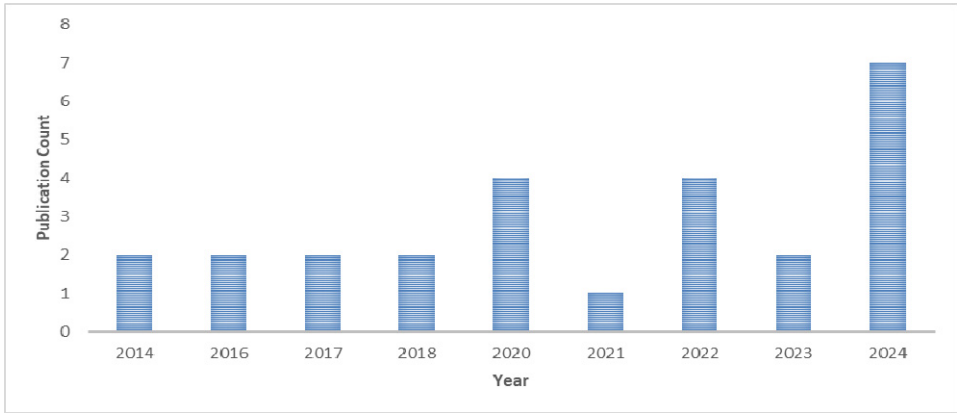
Source: Adapted from Moher et al. (2009)

3 Results and analysis

3.1 Descriptive analysis

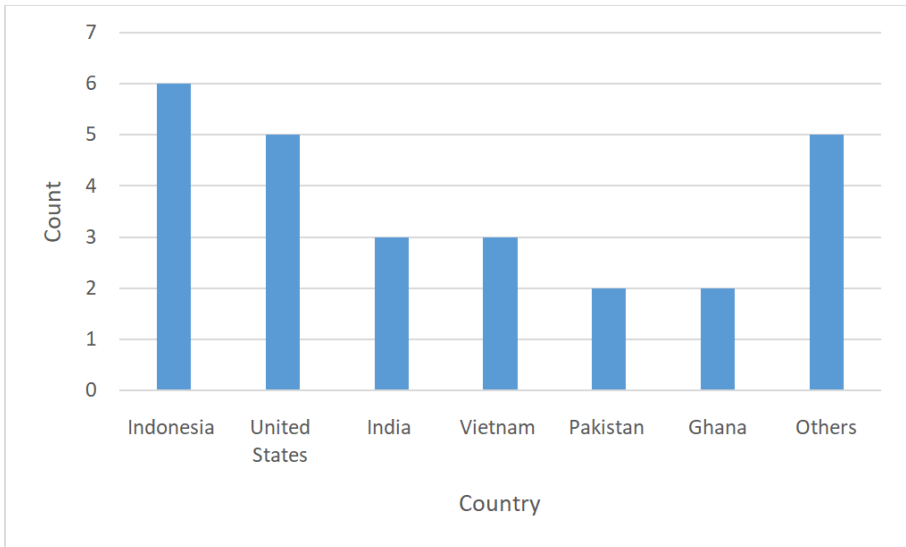
The corpus of 25 publications was descriptively analysed to delineate publication trends, contributing regions and influential journals. As illustrated in Figure 2, there has been varying degrees of research activity since 2014, with 2024 recording the highest count (7), followed by 2022 (4) and 2020 (4). This finding suggests a growing scholarly interest in the topic. However, the irregular distribution of publications over time may reflect a lack of coordinated or sustained research efforts during the covered period, pointing to the need for more programmatic investigation to foster theoretical development.

Figure 2 Descriptive analysis summary (see online version for colours)



Regarding the region of publication, Indonesia contributed the most (6), followed by the USA (5), India (3), Vietnam (3), Ghana (2), Pakistan (1) and others (5) (see Figure 3). This distribution illustrates a global interest in the factors influencing brand loyalty in the SME sector. However, this descriptive analysis underscores Indonesia and the USA as the leading voices in shaping research in this area. Though the prominence of these countries reflects their strong academic output, it raises concerns about regional disparities in research representation. Specifically, it highlights possible regional inequality in knowledge production, failing to fully capture the contextual nuances of enterprises in diverse socio-economic and environmental contexts.

Figure 3 Distribution of articles across countries (see online version for colours)



In terms of publication journals, articles were distributed across various journals (see Table 2). Only *the International Journal of Emerging Markets* was featured twice, suggesting that no journal clearly stands out as a pivotal hub for disseminating knowledge on the vital factors that foster customer brand loyalty at the organisational, product, individual and environmental levels. This dispersal could suggest that the field is yet to adopt a consolidated research identity, making it challenging to advance unified frameworks.

Table 2 Journal frequency

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<i>Journal of Global Fashion Marketing</i>	1
<i>Acta Commercii</i>	1
<i>Open Journal of Business and Management</i>	1
<i>Information Management and Business Review</i>	1
<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics</i>	1
<i>Procedia Computer Science</i>	1
<i>Sustainability</i>	1
<i>Sustainable Production and Consumption</i>	1
<i>International Journal of Emerging Markets</i>	2
<i>Measuring Business Excellence</i>	1
<i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i>	1
<i>The Asian Journal of Technology Management</i>	1
<i>Journal of Alexandria University for Administrative Sciences</i>	1
<i>Asian Academy of Management Journal</i>	1
<i>International Business Research</i>	1
<i>Journal of Promotion Management</i>	1
<i>Tourism Management (1982)</i>	1
<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	1
<i>International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management</i>	1
<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	1
<i>Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal</i>	1
<i>SHS Web of Conference</i>	1
<i>International Journal of Management Research and Reviews</i>	1
<i>International Journal of Social Service and Research</i>	1

3.2 Qualitative results

Twenty-six (26) studies that met the inclusion criteria were subsequently thoroughly reviewed to uncover emerging themes. The findings highlighted two product level, four organisational-level, two individual-level and one environmental-level factors influencing brand in the SME sector (see Table 3). Each of these factors is presented in the subsequent subsections.

Table 3 Categories, sub-categories, studies and article frequencies

<i>Category</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Studies</i>	<i>Total</i>
Product-level factors	Product packaging	(Chen-Yu et al., 2016; Dumasi et al., 2014; Mensah et al., 2022; Oppong and Phiri, 2018; Rehman and Elahi, 2024)	6
	Perceived product quality	(Abigail et al., 2024; Madueke and Eyupoglu, 2024; Tuan and Rajagopal, 2017)	3
Organisational-level factors	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)	(Le, 2023; Le et al., 2023)	2
	Loyalty programs	(Curatman and Suroso, 2022; Maity and Gupta, 2016)	2
	Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	(Abadi et al., 2020; El Sheik et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2021; Saleh and Laura, 2014)	5
	Value creation	(Lyu et al., 2022; Busser and Shulga, 2018)	2
Personal-level factors	Hedonic shopping	(Lee, 2024; Lee and Park, 2024)	3
	Trust	(Tena-Monferrer et al., 2022; Kim and Tang, 2020)	1
Environmental-level factors	Store ambience	(Alfiansyah et al., 2024; Gowrishankar, 2017; Sunefo and Harjanti, 2020)	3

3.2.1 *Product-level marketing factors*

A thematic analysis of the reviewed studies revealed two product-level factors driving brand loyalty in the SME context: product packaging ($n = 6$) and perceived product quality ($n = 3$).

- *Product packaging*: Multiple studies highlight the significance of overall packaging, perceived value for money and semiotics in predicting brand loyalty. Drawing evidence from the paint retailing industry, Dumasi et al. (2014) concluded that overall product packaging has a positive and significant influence on brand loyalty. Oppong and Phiri (2018) illustrated that customer satisfaction with product packaging improves customers' loyalty toward a brand due to the perceived value for money. Similarly, Rehman and Elahi (2024) emphasised the importance of packaging components, specifically semiotics (such as colour, image, printed information and logo), as predictors of brand image and perceived brand quality, ultimately leading to brand loyalty. Chen-Yu et al. (2016) emphasised that brand loyalty increases when a product's descriptions match consumers' expectations. Collectively, these findings underscore the crucial role of packaging in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering long-term brand loyalty.
- *Product quality*: The findings from the review further demonstrated a link between product quality and brand loyalty. Tuan and Rajagopal (2017) illustrated that perceived product quality influences customers' loyalty toward a product. Evidence from Madueke and Eyupoglu's (2024) study provided a more elaborate outlook, suggesting that product quality dimensions (such as convenience and ease of use)

increase customer loyalty, resulting in brand loyalty. It was also established that product quality enhances customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to brand loyalty (Abigail et al., 2024).

3.2.2 Organisational-level factors

- **CSR:** This study identifies a limited strand of literature indicating that consumers develop brand loyalty toward enterprises that demonstrate a commitment to economic, social and environmental sustainability. Le et al. (2023) highlighted three findings related to the value of CSR in the Vietnamese SME sector. First, CSR showed a positive relationship with SME performance, illustrating that enterprises emphasising social and environmental responsibilities tend to report better financial outcomes. Second, CSR strongly predicted brand trust and brand loyalty, demonstrating that responsible practices increase confidence and attachment to the brand. Third, brand trust and brand loyalty mediated the relationship between CSR and firm performance. Specifically, CSR indirectly improved performance through brand trust and brand loyalty. Le (2023) disclosed a positive and significant relationship between CSR practices and corporate image, corporate reputation and customer loyalty. Additionally, corporate image, customer loyalty and corporate reputation significantly mediated the effect of CSR on firm performance.
- **Loyalty programmes:** In addition to CSR, this review highlights loyalty programmes as key organisational-level factors that drive brand loyalty among SMEs. Curatman and Suroso's (2022) surveyed of Batik product customers in Indonesia showed that loyalty programmes (such as special discounts, cash-back offers and coupons) significantly influence programme loyalty, which positively affects store loyalty. They further found a partial mediating influence of communication effectiveness (successful delivery of clear, persuasive and meaningful messages) on the association between programme loyalty and store loyalty. Similarly, Maity and Gupta (2016) indicated that loyalty programmes positively influence customers' brand loyalty. However, unlike Curatman and Suroso (2022) and Maity and Gupta (2016) found that communication effectiveness only mediates the relationship between loyalty programmes and brand loyalty among program members.
- **CRM:** Multiple studies converge on the positive relationship between CRM (a strategic approach that combines technologies and data management to improve relations with present and potential customers) (Abadi et al., 2020) and brand loyalty among SMEs. A CRM marketing strategy prioritising customised services to clients leads to high satisfaction levels, improving the prospects of loyal customers (El Sheik et al., 2024). Kumar et al. (2021) emphasised that CRM practices, especially brand management, enhance customer commitment toward an enterprise, making it hard to switch to other businesses regardless of price discrepancies. Saleh and Laura (2014) ascertained that CRM policies emphasising customer experience, employee behaviour and value proposition positively influence customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.
- **Value co-creation:** A limited line of studies stresses the role of value co-creation (multistakeholder collaboration to create value (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) in building brand loyalty among SMEs. Lyu et al. (2022) found that customer value co-creation

enhances customer experience and customer loyalty toward a brand. In consonance, Busser and Shulga (2018) cited the integration of customers in value creation as a vital shaper of citizenship behaviour, cultivating brand loyalty.

3.2.3 Individual-level factors

- **Consumer hedonic shopping behaviour:** The review identifies consumers' hedonic shopping behaviour – shopping driven by pleasure – as a key individual-level predictor of brand loyalty in SMEs. Lee and Park (2024) confirmed that consumers' hedonic shopping behaviour influences attitudinal (psychological commitment) and behavioural (repeat purchase) loyalty. Subsequently, attitudinal loyalty mediates the link between hedonic shopping and behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty also strongly mediates hedonic shopping dimensions (such as entertainment, exploration, gratification, social, status and idea), enhancing customers' behavioural loyalty (Lee, 2024).
- **Consumer trust:** This study discloses a positive relationship between consumer trust and brand loyalty. Notably, reputational trust influences consumers' attitudes toward an enterprise, amplifying intentions to purchase continuously (Tena-Monferrer et al., 2022). Kim and Tang (2020) demonstrated that customers' strong perception of value gains (economically, individually and relationally) from an enterprise leads to satisfaction, influencing their commitment to the brand.

3.2.4 Environmental-level factors

- **Store ambience:** Another strand of publications includes studies examining environmental-level factors and their relationship with brand loyalty within the SMEs context. Sunefo and Harjanti (2020) reported that physical environments with high-quality lighting are more attractive and highly rated by customers. Their study identifies satisfaction as an important mediator of this effect, with highly satisfied customers likely to purchase from the same brand repeatedly. Gowrishankkar (2017) also revealed store ambience, especially lighting and aroma, as a positive driver of customer loyalty toward a brand. Alfiansyah et al. (2024) found that store atmosphere positively and significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty.

4 Discussion

This SLR paper aimed to identify the organisational-, product-, individual- and environmental-level factors influencing brand loyalty in the SME sector. Twenty-five (25) articles that met the study's underpinning inclusion criteria were thoroughly reviewed to achieve this aim. This chapter critically analyses the SLR findings and identifies methodological, contextual, and knowledge gaps within the reviewed literature.

A significantly large number of studies (Abigail et al., 2024; Chen-Yu et al., 2016; Dumasi et al., 2014; Mensah et al., 2022; Madueke and Eyupoglu, 2024; Oppong and Phiri, 2018; Rehman and Elahi, 2024; Tuan and Rajagopal, 2017) revealed a positive association between product level factors (product packaging and perceived product quality) and brand loyalty among SMEs. This outcome is consistent with the proposition that customers often identify themselves with companies that satisfy their needs by

reading the content displayed on the packaging material (Boccia et al., 2024; Enache, 2015). In the context of sustainable development, this correlation underlines the growing acknowledgement of environmentally compliant packaging and ethical production communication. As many consumers globally increasingly develop sustainability consciousness, enterprises that integrate eco-friendly packaging materials and clear communication are likely to build brand loyalty while creating value for the broader environmental and social agenda.

However, this review revealed that specific product packaging factors differ across studies, with some (such as Dumasi et al., 2014) emphasising perceived value for money and others (like Chen-Yu et al., 2016) accentuating semiotics. This discrepancy suggests the potential mediating influence of inconsistent measurement tools, self-reporting bias and divergent operational definitions across studies. In addition to packaging, this review found that the overall product quality drives brand loyalty. The review also noted that quality dimensions, such as ease of use and convenience encourage consumer loyalty toward a brand. This finding is not surprising owing to the positive correlation between product quality management and customer satisfaction, especially in entrepreneurship (Litvaj and Poniščiaková, 2014; Rosário and Figueiredo, 2024; Schaltegger, 2013). Besides enhancing functional value, high-product quality cultivates trust and repeated purchasing, which predict long-term loyalty (Akmal et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2020). For SMEs, prioritising these quality dimensions is imperative in promoting customer retention. Moreover, consistently delivering quality products reinforces a brand's credibility, positioning it as a reliable entity (Wang et al., 2024). Enhanced credibility is vital in today's entrepreneurial context where sustainable business practices are synonymous with competitive advantages.

Multiple publications report a positive nexus between four organisational-level factors (CSR, loyalty programmes, CRM and value creation) and brand loyalty among SMEs. This finding supports the heightened emphasis on the Integrated Reporting (IR) framework as a strategic tool in corporate stakeholder communication. IR is a strategic corporate reporting framework that integrates financial and non-financial information to stakeholders, delivering a comprehensive perspective of a firm's performance strategy, governance and sustainable value creation (Furtuna and Uykulu, 2025). Hichri and Alqatan (2024) found that IR enhances transparency, accountability and long-term trust, supporting this SLR's outcome that CRM, CSR and value creation drive brand loyalty in SMEs. Moreover, board diversity fosters brand loyalty by influencing strategic decisions related to CRM and CSR. Diversely constituted boards are likely to embrace inclusive and socially responsible practices, strengthening brand attachment and reinforcing the link between CRM, CSR and customer loyalty (Alqatan et al., 2025).

The positive link between CSR and brand loyalty (Le, 2023; Le et al., 2023) highlights the significance of SMEs moving beyond the conventional marketing approaches, recognising the changing consumer needs in today's environment where sustainability has become a key customer satisfaction and organisational performance factor (Islam et al., 2021). Extant research confirms this finding, illustrating that consumers across diverse industries consider sustainability factors when purchasing items (Ahamat et al., 2018; Matharu et al., 2021; Pochampally et al., 2009; Srivastava et al., 2024). Kumar et al. (2021) demonstrated that a growing global consumer base is willing to pay extra for brands whose enterprises prioritise sustainable practices. Similarly, John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework emphasises the interconnectedness of sustainability practices and business operations, suggesting that

firms will likely gain a competitive edge and improved brand loyalty if they balance profit with social and environmental considerations (Ameyaw et al., 2024). CSR drives ethical financial behaviour, reinforcing trust and loyalty among customers (Alqatan et al., 2024). Thus, incorporating CSR into business practices, especially within the SME context, predicts brand loyalty.

This review also highlights the positive correlation between loyalty programmes and brand loyalty. Some of the reviewed studies demonstrated that developing a loyalty programme allows enterprises to appeal to consumers, shaping their repeat purchasing intentions (Curatman and Suroso, 2022; Maity and Gupta, 2016). This finding reinforces prior studies, which underscore the provision of customer rewards to augment brand loyalty (Lentz et al., 2022; McCall and McMahon, 2016; Steinhoff and Palmatier, 2016). Besides incentivising continued patronage, loyalty programmes act as a strategic tool for strengthening the emotional attachment between customers and brands (Corbishley et al., 2023). By offering tailored rewards, enterprises can create a sense of belonging and perceived recognition among their customers, potentially reducing brand switching behaviours.

The findings in this study further emphasised CRM as a core organisational level factor associated with brand loyalty (Abadi et al., 2020; El Sheik et al., 2024; Kim and Tang, 2020; Saleh and Laura, 2014). This outcome corroborates with prior studies, which suggest that an effective CRM strategy boosts customer retention in today's competitive market (Li et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2021). The positive relationship between value co-creation and brand loyalty (Lyu et al., 2022; Busser and Shulga, 2018) aligns with other studies (Palakshappa et al., 2024; Voorberg et al., 2015; Vargo, 2021), emphasising the importance of value provision to amplify loyalty towards a specific brand. While this finding is reinforced by Busser and Shulga (2018) and Lyu et al. (2022), it over-emphasises 'co-created value' without adequately accounting for other forms of value, such as functional, emotional and social (Sheth et al., 1991). Depending on customer segment or context, each value dimension could influence brand loyalty uniquely.

A few publications (Lee, 2024; Lee and Park, 2024) pinpointed consumers' hedonic shopping behaviour as a major individual-level marketing factor driving brand loyalty in the SME sector. It was established that hedonic shopping influences attitudinal loyalty, enhancing customers' behavioural loyalty. The outcome aligns with the strong influence of consumers' emotional gratification on their purchasing trends (Bae and Jeon, 2022; Salsabila and Sholahuddin, 2024). This suggests that consumers who perceive shopping experiences as enjoyable and emotionally satisfying will likely demonstrate deeper psychological commitment to a brand, driving consistent purchasing behaviour. Despite this positive outcome, critical intervening factors (such as price sensitivity and product availability) were not acknowledged in the two reviewed studies, potentially resulting in the overstating of the impact of hedonic shopping behaviour on brand loyalty. This insight is relevant in the SME context where enterprises often depend on experiential differentiation to successfully navigate the market and effectively compete with larger firms (Bigné et al., 2021). By designing pleasurable shopping experiences, SMEs can tap into hedonic motivators that promote brand attachment and loyalty beyond transactional value.

In addition to hedonic shopping behaviour, this review ascertained a positive relationship between trust and brand loyalty at the individual level (Kim and Tang, 2020; Tena-Monferrer et al., 2022). Consumer trust positively and significantly predicts loyalty toward a brand. Specifically, consumers who trust a brand due to perceived quality or

reputation are likely to develop a strong attachment and long-term engagement. This finding extends prior research, highlighting trust as psychological contract between consumers and a brand, minimising perceived risk and amplifying consumers' confidence in purchasing decision-making (Chen and Myagmarsuren, 2011; Montgomery et al., 2018). This outcome holds vital significance for the SME sector where brand recognition may be limited and consumers often make decisions based on interpersonal experiences or referral credibility.

Studies examining the influence of environmental-level factors on brand loyalty primarily focused on store ambience. Alfiansyah et al. (2024), Gowrishankar (2017) and Sunefo and Harjanti (2020) demonstrated that attractive store features like lighting and aroma enhance brand loyalty through the mediating influence of satisfaction, corroborating with other studies emphasising creating visually attractive store spaces to manage customer behaviours (Arianty et al., 2020; Bonfanti and Yfantidou, 2021; Murnawati and Khairani, 2018). While the cited publications collectively support the positive link between store ambience and brand loyalty, they do not sufficiently account for individual customer differences or the mediating influence of socio-cultural factors, such as social class, family influence and traditions. For example, what is perceived as a 'pleasant' store environment by some consumers may vary across cultural contexts, demographics, and income groups. Additionally, the review findings do not account for other core environmental-level factors, such as satisfaction and brand experience, which have been shown to predict brand loyalty (Hariandja and Vincent, 2022; Mittal et al., 2023). Overall, while the positive relationship between store ambience and brand loyalty is vividly elaborated, a more comprehensive framework incorporating other environmental factors is needed to enhance theoretical robustness.

The reviewed publications collectively identify a range of organisational, product, individual and environmental level factors that influence brand loyalty among SMEs. Nevertheless, many notable contextual, methodological and knowledge gaps emerge from this SLR. First, the geographical scope of the studies is highly restricted to specific countries, especially Indonesia and the USA, undermining the generalisability of the findings across broader cultural, economic and industry contexts. Second, the methodological homogeneity, especially the predominant use of cross-sectional designs, is problematic – it restricts the ability to infer causal links between marketing factors and brand loyalty. Third, the heavy reliance on quantitative methodologies by many studies further limits the depth of insight into the intricate and dynamic nature of brand loyalty. While quantitative methods may capture correlational trends, they often fail to uncover nuanced experiences and motivations that drive consumer loyalty toward a brand. Moreover, the reviewed studies tend to neglect several critical organisational- and individual-level factors, notably customer service quality and consumer feedback, despite their well-documented influence on brand loyalty (Chae and Ko, 2016; Leckie et al., 2016; Redine et al., 2023).

5 Conclusions, implications and limitations

The studies reviewed in this SLR paper provided valuable insights into the question: what are the organisational, individual, environmental and product-level factors that influence brand loyalty in the SME sector? This review uncovered several factors across the four levels that influence brand loyalty in the SME sector. At the product level, it was

established that product packaging and quality predict brand loyalty. CSR, CRM, value creation and loyalty programmes emerged as key organisational-level factors that interact to cultivate consumer attachment and ultimately brand loyalty. The review further showed that two individual-level factors, namely consumer hedonic shopping behaviour and trust, influence brand loyalty. However, the review revealed that store ambience is the key driver of brand loyalty at the environmental level.

This paper has significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the outcomes emphasise the development of an elaborate theoretical framework that integrates multi-level factors to build a nuanced understanding of the antecedents of brand loyalty. Instead of relying solely on existing theoretical frameworks, the development of a new, integrative model encompassing organisational, product, environmental and personal-level factors can offer significant and comprehensive insights into the cultivation of brand loyalty within the SME sector. Practical implications from this SLR include the need for SMEs to build a marketing strategy integrating organisational, product, environmental and personal level factors to boost their brand loyalty.

Future research should capitalise on the limitations of this SLR to better understand the link between factors at different contextual levels and brand loyalty. Though this review is based on empirical evidence from prior research, a few limitations are worth noting. Articles were retrieved from two databases (Scopus and ProQuest) using an iterative keyword search, possibly missing other quality studies. Thus, future studies should consider broadening their database search to augment the prospects of accessing as many high-quality articles as possible. The study employed exclusion criteria based on four marketing levels, which may have introduced subjective bias in the selection and evaluation of articles. Future research should address this limitation by including other marketing variables, notably social media marketing, to draw parallels between divergent factors, leading to more informed practical implications.

This review also suffers from a relatively small number of publications that were analysed. While the 25 studies provided in-depth insights into the research problem, a large sample would help identify more factors that can potentially influence brand loyalty. Hence, future research should refine the search strategy by expanding the scope to include contexts such as digital interfaces, thereby increasing the probability of accessing and analysing more studies. Additionally, a significant proportion of the reviewed sources was heavily concentrated in Asian and Western contexts, with a notable overrepresentation of countries such as Indonesia and the USA. This geographic imbalance highlights the need for future research to incorporate more diverse regional perspectives, particularly from underrepresented areas such as the Middle East, Latin America and Africa, to enhance the generalisability and applicability of the findings.

Moreover, the findings of this SLR are limited by a dearth of cross-cultural insights across the literature. Most of the studies reviewed (e.g., Abadi et al., 2020; Alfiansyah et al., 2024; Gowrishankar, 2017; Lee, 2024; Lee and Park, 2024) rely heavily on data from specific regions, offering limited or no insights from diverse geographical and cultural contexts. To improve the generalisability and practical relevance of the existing literature, future research could employ cross-cultural comparative frameworks or adopt longitudinal research designs. A cross-cultural approach would allow scholars to examine how cultural, economic and institutional contexts influence the relative influence of product-level (packaging, quality), organisational-level (CSR, CRM, value creation) and

individual-level (trust, hedonic shopping) drivers of brand loyalty in SMEs. Such comparisons can uncover whether these factors are universally applicable or context-dependent.

A longitudinal design would explicate how brand loyalty evolves in response to strategic interventions, market dynamics and shifting consumer preferences. Such an approach would offer a more nuanced understanding of causality and the lasting effects of initiatives like loyalty programmes and CSR engagement. Cross-cultural comparative frameworks or longitudinal research designs employing transparent and replicable methodologies would enhance research reliability and comparability across settings, significantly contributing to theory development and providing practical guidance to SME managers operating in diverse markets.

Declarations

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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