Research Article

The Effect of Brand Activism, Perceived Quality, and Brand Reputation on Customer Loyalty with Customer Satisfaction as a Mediating Variable

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Abstract: Customers of McDonald's in Banjarmasin will be the subjects of an empirical study that aims to mediate the relationship between brand activism, perceived quality, and brand reputation and customer loyalty via the medium of customer happiness. The study's methodology was quantitative and based on a causal connection design. A total of 153 people met the inclusion criteria of being at least 18 years old and having bought McDonald's items at least three times. This selection was done via purposive sampling. A questionnaire was used to gather data, which was then analyzed using SmartPLS software and Partial Least Squares (PLS). Brand activism, perceived quality, reputation, and customer happiness are the factors that have the most impact on brand loyalty, according to the data. Having said that, consumer pleasure is unaffected by brand reputation. These findings suggest that McDonald's should prioritize enhancing product quality and customer satisfaction while maintaining a positive brand image through effective brand activism and reputation management.

Keywords: Brand Activism; Brand Loyalty; Brand Reputation; Customer Satisfaction; Perceived Quality.

1. Introduction

Indonesia's current economic growth is highly dependent on household consumption, with the food and beverage sector one of the main drivers of development. From 2011 to 2023, this industry has shown a stable, sustainable growth pattern, with the highest contribution to national GDP in 2023. Intense rivalry among enterprises to control an ever-expanding market characterizes the mature food and beverage industry in Indonesia, as this circumstance demonstrates.

Alongside the dynamics of contemporary socio-economic developments, innovation in food production has also accelerated, including in the fast-food sub-sector, which has experienced significant expansion. The emergence of various fast food restaurant chains in Indonesia has created a highly competitive environment among brands. Some of the most dominant and popular chains include KFC, McDonald's, HokBen (Hoka-Hoka Bento), A&W, and Richeese Factory. In this context, the fast-food restaurant sub-sector has shown strong growth, with McDonald's maintaining its competitive position as one of the leading global brands in the Indonesian market, often ranking at the top or leading in sales and consumer preferences.

Brand activism has significant potential to shape customer loyalty, especially when it aligns with consumer values and is implemented authentically and sustainably. Conversely, if such activism is perceived as insincere or opportunistic, it can have adverse effects, including

consumer disappointment, migration to competitor brands, decreased trust, and an overall decline in loyalty. Perceptions of inauthenticity often trigger adverse responses such as boycott campaigns, which ultimately affect predictions of consumer loyalty behaviour toward the brand in question (Budi Utomo et al., 2023). McDonald's was chosen as the object of research because of its status as a global brand with a substantial market share in Indonesia, including in Banjarmasin, where recent phenomena related to brand activism—such as the controversy over Israeli franchise donations to the military during the Gaza conflict—have triggered a wave of national boycotts from late 2023 to the present. This has led to a decline in sales in Muslim-majority markets, including Indonesia. Finding out how consumer satisfaction, as a moderator, relates to the following factors is the driving force for this study: brand activism, quality perception, and brand reputation as they pertain to customer loyalty. Given this context, the following research question is developed: 1. Does brand activism influence customer loyalty to McDonald's in Banjarmasin? 2. Does quality perception influence customer satisfaction with McDonald's in Banjarmasin? 3. Does brand reputation influence customer loyalty to McDonald's in Banjarmasin? 4. Does customer satisfaction influence customer loyalty to McDonald's in Banjarmasin? 5. Does brand reputation influence customer satisfaction with McDonald's in Banjarmasin? 6. Does perceived quality influence customer loyalty to McDonald's in Banjarmasin?

2. Literature Review

Brand Activism

According to Moorman (2020), brand activism is a company's effort to openly convey its stance or take action, either on behalf of individuals or on behalf of the brand itself, regarding political issues that are currently hotly debated. If consumers perceive these steps as inconsistent with the values or commitments previously conveyed by the brand, these activities are more likely to be seen as mere marketing tactics. As a result, customers feel disappointed, which can manifest as a boycott, namely an active refusal to buy products or use the company's services as an expression of their disapproval.

Perceived Quality

According to Kotler and Keller (2009), perception is a process carried out by individuals to select, organise, and interpret various incoming information to produce a meaningful understanding of the world around them. The essence of this perception is that it not only depends on physical stimuli but is also influenced by the surrounding environment and the individual's personal circumstances. The perception of product quality differs from the actual objective quality because perception focuses more on holistic subjective evaluation rather than on the product's technical properties or features. Happiness of Customers When buyers' expectations for a product are met, an emotional reaction known as customer satisfaction develops (Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong, 2018). When a product lives up to or beyond consumer expectations, it's a win-win. When it falls short, however, consumers are understandably unhappy. Essentially, this satisfaction describes the customer's affective response after purchasing and using the product, reflecting the degree to which the product and service have met or exceeded previously formed expectations.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty can be defined as a strong bond consumers demonstrate through repeated purchases of the same brand (Khasanah et al., 2021). If customers feel a close emotional connection to the brand and derive mutual benefits from their interactions, this bond will become even stronger, ultimately encouraging them to remain loyal over the long term.
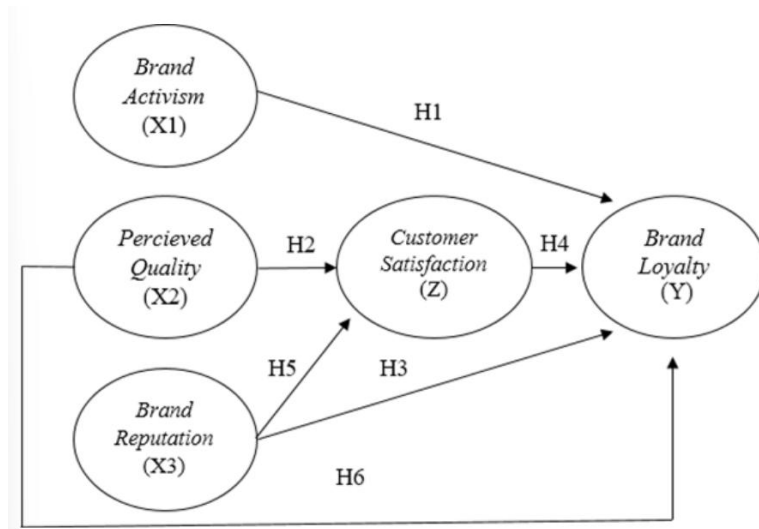
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Hypothesis Development

The following is the working hypothesis of the research, derived from the preceding discussion and theoretical framework: H1: Brand Activism influences Brand Loyalty. H2: Perceived Quality influences Customer Satisfaction H3: Brand Reputation affects Brand Loyalty H4: Customer Satisfaction affects Brand Loyalty H5: Brand Reputation affects Customer Satisfaction H6: Perceived Quality influences Brand Loyalty

3. Method

Explanatory and quantitative research methods were used in this study. Individuals who have purchased or used goods or services from McDonald's establishments in the Banjarmasin region make up the study population. This research employed a purposive sampling strategy, which resulted in 153 participants who were 18 years of age or older. The data was collected by the distribution of questionnaires, and then processed and analyzed using SmartPLS software's SEM-PLS technique, which is based on PLS. The operational definitions in this study include five main variables, namely Brand Activism, Quality Perception, Brand Reputation, Customer Satisfaction, and Brand Loyalty. These five variables were measured using a series of indicators shown to be valid and reliable, drawing on previous studies in the relevant literature.

Table 1. Operational Variable Definitions.

Variabel	Definition	Indicators	
Brand Activism (X1)	Public actions or statements by companies on political Issues that involve the company's brand and individuals	a.	Value-based
		b.	Controversial
		c.	Focus on external communication
		d.	Driven by public interest
Perceived Quality (X2)	Customer perception of the overall quality of products/services compared to available alternatives	a)	High-quality products
		b)	Trusted products
		c)	Delivering on expectations
Brand Reputation (X3)	Public perception that the brand has credibility and is reliable	a.	Widely recognized
		b.	Brand reliability
		c.	Positive identity

		a) Relative satisfaction
Customer Satisfaction (Z)	Level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction after comparing actual performance with expectations	b) Overall satisfaction
		c) Purchase decision
		d) Confirmation of expectations
Brand Loyalty (Y)	Customer commitment through repeat purchase of a particular brand	a. Brand commitment
		b. Recommendations
		c. Repeat purchases

Source: processed primary data (2022)

Table 2. Results of Discriminant Validity Test.

Relationship Between Variables	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Description
Brand Activism (X1) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	-0.222	2.311	0.021	Significant (negative)
Brand Reputation (X3) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.437	3.175	0.002	Significant
Brand Reputation (X3) → Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.389	5.329	0.000	Significant
Customer Satisfaction (Z) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.492	2.453	0.014	Significant
Perceived Quality (X2) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.170	1.048	0.295	Not Significant
Perceived Quality (X2) → Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.593	8.181	0.000	Significant

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

4. Results

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents in this study included 56 males and 97 females. Most respondents were aged 18-22, with the majority of students residing in the North Banjarmasin District.

Outer Model
Convergent Validity

Correlating the values of individual indicators with the overall score of the concept is one way to evaluate convergent validity in a measuring methodology that uses reflective indicators. A reflective indicator is considered to meet the requirements for good convergent validity if its correlation coefficient (loading factor) is above 0.70 for the related construct. On the other hand, loading levels between 0.50 and 0.60 are still appropriate for developing research instruments in their early phases (Ghozali, 2021:68).

Table 3. Outer Loading (Convergent Validity)

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Description
Brand Activism	X1.1	0.853	Valid
	X1.2	0.885	Valid
	X1.3	0.814	Valid
	X1.4	0.872	Valid
Perceived Quality	X2.1	0.885	Valid
	X2.2	0.900	Valid
	X2.3	0.908	Valid
Brand Reputation	X3.1	0.754	Valid
	X3.2	0.901	Valid
	X3.3	0.813	Valid
Customer Satisfaction	Z1.1	0.862	Valid
	Z1.2	0.908	Valid
	Z1.3	0.879	Valid
	Z1.4	0.907	Valid
Brand Loyalty	Y1.1	0.916	Valid
	Y1.2	0.909	Valid
	Y1.3	0.908	Valid

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity of an indicator can be assessed by comparing its cross-loadings on the construct it measures with those on other constructs. If the correlation of the indicator with its original construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, this indicates that the latent construct has stronger predictive ability for indicators within its own group than for indicators from other construct groups (Ghozali, 2021).

Table 4. Outer Loading (Discriminant Validity).

Indikator	BA	PQ	BR	BL	CS
X1.1	0.853	0.622	0.587	0.540	0.637
X2.2	0.687	0.900	0.829	0.796	0.877
X3.2	0.714	0.838	0.901	0.789	0.876
Y1.2	0.628	0.771	0.793	0.909	0.798
Z2.4	0.769	0.860	0.864	0.797	0.907

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

Construct Reliability

The purpose of construct reliability testing is to ensure that a research instrument consistently and accurately measures the specified construct. According to Rahadi (2023), the SEM method employs Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate construct dependability. When both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability are more than 0.6, we say that the construct has strong reliability (Duryadi, 2021:62).

Table 5. Outer Loading (Construct Reliability).

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Brand Activism	0.879	0.917	Reliable
Brand Loyalty	0.898	0.936	Reliable
Brand Reputation	0.763	0.864	Reliable
Customer Satisfaction	0.912	0.938	Reliable
Perceived Quality	0.880	0.926	Reliable

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

Analysis Results

The t-statistic and the consequent p-value were compared to test the hypothesis in the structural model connection. The t-statistic is considered significant at a 5% level ($\alpha = 0.05$) if its threshold value is 1.96. If there is a substantial impact between the tested variables, as shown by a t-statistic of 1.96 or a p-value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be accepted.

Table 6. Path Coefficient.

Relationship Between Variables	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Descriptio
BA → BL	-0.222	2.311	0.021	Significant (Negative)
BR → BL	0.437	3.175	0.002	Significant
BR → CS	0.389	5.329	0.000	Significant
CS → BL	0.492	2.453	0.014	Significant
PQ → BL	0.170	1.048	0.295	Not significant
PQ → CS	0.593	8.181	0.000	Significant

Source: Processed primary data (2025)

5. Discussion

The Influence of Brand Activism on Brand Loyalty

A regression coefficient of -0.222, a t-statistic value of 2.311 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a probability of 0.021 ($p < 0.05$) show that the Brand Activism variable (X1) significantly affects Brand Loyalty (Y) among McDonald's consumers in Banjarmasin City, according to the results of the hypothesis testing.These findings indicate that high brand activism tends to reduce customer loyalty, especially when consumers perceive it negatively; conversely, when consumers perceive it positively, it can increase brand loyalty.

The Effect of Perceived Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The hypothesis testing results show that the Perceived Quality (X2) variable has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction (Z) among McDonald's customers. This is supported by the variable's 0.437 regression coefficient, 3.175 t-statistic value (above the critical value of 1.96), and 0.002 probability ($p < 0.05$). This finding supports the view expressed by Andik, S. D. S., & Rachma (2022) that a high level of perceived quality—including aspects like taste, cleanliness, service speed, and product quality consistency—leads to a high level of customer satisfaction. Perceived quality reflects customers' overall evaluation of the superiority of McDonald's products and services, reinforced by innovations such as local menus, delivery services, and the digitalisation of orders via applications, which ultimately increase convenience and strengthen consumers' perception of quality.

The Effect of Brand Reputation on Brand Loyalty

Based on the re-gression coefficient of 0.389, the t-statistic of 5.329 (greater than the critical value of 1.96), and the probability of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), the hypothesis testing results show that the Brand Reputation variable (X3) has a positive and significant effect on Brand Loyalty (Y) among McDonald's customers. According to these results, a solid intangible asset in generating long-term client loyalty is a positive reputation for the brand. McDonald's, as

an established and well-known fast-food restaurant brand, has successfully leveraged its reputation through consistent taste and reliable product quality, along with quick responses and effective recovery strategies to emerging issues, ultimately restoring consumer confidence and reinforcing positive perceptions of its brand identity as a reliable entity.

The Influence of Customer Satisfaction on Brand Loyalty

With a 0.492 coefficient, a t-statistic of 2.453 > 1.96, and a probability value of 0.014 (p <0.05), the correlation between Customer Satisfaction (Z) and Brand Loyalty (Y) is statistically significant. It shows that the Brand Reputation (X3) has a positive and significant effect on the Brand Loyalty (Y) of McDonald's consumers. The level of consumer satisfaction with the McDonald's brand is a key component in building and sustaining customer loyalty. The relative satisfaction that customers think with their satisfaction and happiness every time they shop for McDonald's products reinforces their desire to continue choosing McDonald's. In addition, positive experiences while shopping at McDonald's provide overall satisfaction and build customer loyalty. The fulfilment of expectations obtained by customers while shopping at McDonald's also helps increase customer loyalty

The Influence of Brand Reputation on Customer Satisfaction

A t-statistic of 1.048 (<1.96) and a probability value of 0.295 (p < 0.05) indicate that the Brand Reputation (X3) variable has an effect on Customer Satisfaction (Z) to the tune of 0.593.This suggests that, for McDonald's clientele, Brand Reputation (X3) has a positive but statistically negligible effect on Customer Satisfaction (Z). Company reputation is an assessment of a company made by a group of people based on their perceptions. Customer satisfaction is positively correlated with brand reputation in this research. Customers are more loyal to well-known brands when they have a good impression of them, suggesting that consumers' opinions about McDonald's reputation do not significantly impact their level of satisfaction.

The Effect of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

A t-statistic of 8.181 > 1.96 and a probability value of 0 (p <0.05) indicate that the "Perceived Quality (X2) variable has an impact on Brand Loyalty (Y), with a coefficient of 0.17. This proves that, for McDonald's clientele, Perceived Quality (X2) has a positive and statistically significant effect on Brand Loyalty (Y)."

6. Conclusion

The study's conclusion is based on the data and analysis shown above, which are as follows: 1) "Brand Activism is predicted to have a significant effect on Brand Loyalty for McDonald's products. 2) Perceived Quality is predicted to have a significant effect on Customer Satisfaction for McDonald's products. 3) Brand Reputation is predicted to have a significant effect on Brand Loyalty for McDonald's products. 4) Customer Satisfaction is predicted to have a significant effect on Brand Loyalty for McDonald's products. 5) Brand Reputation is predicted to have no significant effect on Customer Satisfaction with McDonald's products. 6) Perceived Quality is predicted to have a significant effect on Brand Loyalty for McDonald's products"

Implications

In a theoretical sense, this research adds to what is already known about the connections between brand activism, perceived quality, reputation, consumer happiness, and loyalty. In practice, for McDonald's management, these findings recommend maintaining consistent product and service quality, improving customer service, and managing brand activism activities more sensitively, aligned with Indonesian values, to minimise negative impacts and maximise benefits for consumer loyalty.

Limitations

This study is limited to the Banjarmasin City area and focuses on only one brand (McDonald's), making it difficult to generalise the results. In addition, the respondents were predominantly young people, not representative of the entire customer segment.

Recommendations

Future research should expand the study area, compare several fast-food brands, and include moderating variables such as brand trust or price perception to deepen the analysis.

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