The Mediating Role of Brand Equity in the Relationship Between Perceived Quality and Consumer Loyalty

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the impact of perceived quality on consumer loyalty, with brand equity serving as a mediating variable among Samsung smartphone users in Indonesia. The sample comprised 137 respondents, obtained through purposive convenience sampling. The analysis technique is Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) conducted using the IBM SPSS AMOS 24 application program. The findings reveal that while perceived quality does not have a direct impact on consumer loyalty, it does have a significant positive effect on brand equity, which in turn has a positive and significant impact on consumer loyalty. Brand equity has a positive and significant impact on consumer loyalty. In addition, brand equity mediates the effect of perceived quality on consumer loyalty fully. Therefore, brand equity plays a mediating role in consumer loyalty.
Keywords: Perceived Quality; Brand Equity; and Consumer Loyalty.

1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of consumer loyalty remains a crucial topic of research in contemporary business and academic circles. This is because consumers who exhibit loyalty towards a particular product or brand tend to have a strong emotional attachment to it, and are more likely to purchase and use the product or brand repeatedly, even when faced with alternative options (Saleh and Siagian, 2020). Brands with such loyal consumers are better equipped to withstand market shocks, and are more likely to survive and thrive in the long term (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Therefore, it is essential for companies to focus on building, maintaining, and enhancing consumer loyalty, as this will enable them to establish long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with their customers (Hakim and Purwoko, 2019). In conclusion, it is imperative for businesses to prioritize the formation and cultivation of consumer loyalty as an integral part of their overall business strategy.

The formation of consumer loyalty is influenced by quality perceptions (see Kristianto and Wahyudi, 2019; Faizal and Nurjanah, 2019; Ramadhanti and Sulistiono, 2022). Quality perception is defined as consumer responses and thoughts on the quality and excellence of a product or brand tailored to the desired purpose (Raharja and Aksari, 2019). This construct includes the features and characteristics of the product as a whole arising from its ability to perform functions to meet needs (Kotler and Keller, 2009). A study conducted by Faizal and Nurjanah (2019) which examined the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty in Mazda car users stated that quality perception was proven to significantly affect consumer loyalty.

In addition to quality perception, another factor that influences the formation of consumer loyalty is brand equity (see Hakim and Purwoko, 2019; Siagian et al., 2021; Tamara and Son, 2021). How consumers' thoughts, actions, and feelings towards a product will increase the added value of the product is the definition of brand equity (Kotler and Keller, 2009). According to Ramdani (2022), the scope of brand equity includes all assets and liabilities related to brands such as symbols and names that are able to provide strength or added value to products, both for companies and consumers. Products with strong brand equity will help companies build good relationships and clear consumer doubts about their products or brands (Rido et al., 2023).

In addition to conceptualizing quality perception and brand equity as predictors of consumer loyalty, this study also conceptualizes the role of brand equity as a mediating variable in the relationship between quality perception and consumer loyalty. This is because the indirect influence of quality perception in shaping consumer loyalty will increase when mediated by brand equity. Consumers who perceive a product to have high quality will perceive the product as having high added value and in turn will form a high level of loyalty to the product (see Wickremasinghe and Gamini, 2020; Lesmana et al., 2021; Siagian et al., 2021). A study conducted by Raharja and Aksari (2019) indicates that in evaluating brand equity, quality perception is one of the important elements. The existence of a strong and positive perception from consumers of the quality of a product or brand will increase the equity of the product or brand (Nurika and Sukresna, 2021). Then brand equity is the main driving factor of consumer loyalty (Widyastuti and Hakim, 2019). So the formation of a positive perception of quality will increase brand equity. With the increase in brand equity, consumer loyalty will also increase.

The context of the study used in this study is Samsung brand smartphones. Based on data on the growth of the smartphone market per year (year over year / YoY) in Indonesia from the International Data Corporation (IDC) at the end of 2022, Samsung is the only smartphone brand that shows an increase when the development of the smartphone market in Indonesia as a whole is stated to decline by 14.3%. Samsung's smartphones showed a 5.4% increase, while other brands showed a decline. Data shows that in 2021, Samsung was able to distribute 7.2 million of its smartphone products and controlled 17.6% of Indonesia's smartphone market share. Then in 2022, Samsung's smartphones have increased by successfully distributing 7.6 million of its products and controlling 21.7% of the smartphone market share in Indonesia. In addition, Samsung smartphones have not always been the main

leader in the Indonesian smartphone market. However, according to the survey results for the February-March 2023 period from Katadata Insight Center (KIC), Samsung is the most widely known smartphone brand by respondents with a percentage of 78.2% of all 18 respondents. If you look at the data from the International Data Corporation (IDC) and Katadata Insight Center (KIC) data mentioned earlier, Samsung looks like a brand that has advantages and has a strong position in the market. Based on the explanation that has been put forward, it is known that Samsung is a superior brand, so it is possible to have a strong loyal consumer base. Therefore, factors that can trigger the formation of consumer loyalty to the Samsung smartphone brand are interesting topics to research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Consumer Loyalty

Kotler and Keller (2009) define consumer loyalty as a consumer commitment to make purchases sustainably and provide support for a product or brand. Consumer loyalty is a behavior that shows consumer loyalty to certain products or brands (Hakim and Purwoko, 2019). Consumer loyalty is a form of positive consumer attitude towards a brand that will lead to the desire for repeat purchases, even though faced with many alternatives from competing brands (Raharja and Aksari, 2019). Loyal consumers will tend to be attached to certain products or brands and make repeated purchases and uses of those products or brands, even though they are faced with many alternative choices (Saleh and Siagian, 2020). High loyalty will also make consumers less sensitive to prices, so they will make repeat purchases on the same product or brand even at high prices, as long as they are satisfied with the product or brand (Kristianto and Wahyudi, 2019). So consumer loyalty is one of the important focuses of attention to be maintained and improved by the company, including so that the relationship with 28 consumers is well established, because consumers have a tendency to easily switch from one product or brand to another (Hakim and Purwoko, 2019). From this explanation, the understanding of consumer loyalty is concluded as a form of positive consumer behavior towards a product or brand in the form of loyalty and commitment to support the product or brand, even when faced with other alternatives.

Quality Perception

The notion of quality perception is explained by Raharja and Aksari (2019) as consumer thoughts and responses regarding the quality and superiority of a product or brand that is tailored to the desired purpose, compared to other alternatives. Quality perception is

consumer perception of all product features and characteristics, including consistency of product quality, ease of use and improvement, or other product attributes (Faizal and Nurjanah, 2019). Quality perception is a consumer's thoughts and assessments of product quality based on their own subjective evaluation, not from managers or experts (Pandiangan et al., 2021). From the explanation above, the understanding of quality perception is concluded as an assessment of the quality of a product or brand derived from the subjective thinking of consumers.

Brand Equity

Kotler and Armstrong (2008) explain brand equity as a positive consumer response to a product that is supported by consumer knowledge or recognition of the product brand. While Kotler and Keller (2009) define brand equity as the added value of products that are reflected in the way consumers think, feel, and act towards the brand based on the experience felt by consumers when using the product or brand. Brand equity is a manifestation of the strength of a brand that has an important influence in directing consumer behavior towards the brand (Mardikaningsih and Putra, 2021). Brand equity includes all assets and liabilities related to the brand, which can provide added value to its products (Ramdani, 2022). Brand equity results from higher consumer trust in a particular brand compared to its competitor brands (Kataria, 2019). Strong brand equity will help companies establish good relationships and eliminate consumer doubts about their products or brands (Rido et al., 2023). When the equity of a product or brand is high, the product will gain a competitive advantage, and will increase brand awareness and loyalty to consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). From this explanation, the notion of brand equity is concluded as the strength or added value of a brand, which comes from consumer attitudes and thoughts towards the product or brand.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The Effect of Quality Perception on Consumer Loyalty

Quality perception is consumer responses and thoughts on the quality and superiority of products or brands that are tailored to the desired goals, compared to other alternatives (Raharja and Aksari, 2019). When consumers think that certain products or brands are considered good quality, or in other words they have a positive perception of quality in a product or brand, they will tend to be loyal and loyal to the product or brand (Kristianto and Wahyudi, 2019). Research by Faizal and Nurjanah (2019) on four-wheeled vehicle users proves that when there is an increase in positive quality perceptions in consumers, consumer

loyalty also increases. The better the perception of quality towards a product or brand, the more consumer loyalty increases. Raharja and Aksari's (2019) research on people who have used Reebok shoes states that the higher the perception of positive consumer quality in a product, the consumer loyalty will also increase. Research by Ramadhanti and Sulistiono (2022) conducted on consumers of Gojek transportation service products also proves that perceptions of service quality affect consumer loyalty positively and significantly. Then the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Quality Perception Has a Direct Positive and Significant Influence on the Formation of Consumer Loyalty in Samsung Smartphone Users in Indonesia.

The Effect of Quality Perception on Brand Equity

The brand equity value consists of five points, among which include quality perception, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, and other exclusive brand assets. Where quality perception is one of the most important assets (Aaker in Hakim and Purwoko, 2019). Based on research conducted by Pandiangan et al. (2021) on smartphone users, it is stated that quality perception affects brand equity positively and significantly. Siagian et al.'s (2021) research on Oppo brand smartphone users concluded that quality perception significantly affects brand equity. Nurika and Sukresna's (2021) research on consumers of ready-to-drink packaged Nescafe beverage products also resulted in the conclusion that quality perception has a positive influence on brand equity. Then the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2: Quality Perception Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Brand Equity in Samsung Smartphone Users in Indonesia.

The Effect of Brand Equity on Consumer Loyalty Previous research on the effect of brand equity on consumer loyalty has been conducted by Hakim and Purwoko (2019) on consumers of anti-acne products in three shopping centers. Of the three shopping centers where the study was conducted, one showed a negative and insignificant effect of brand equity on consumer loyalty. Meanwhile, the other two shopping centers support that there is an influence between brand equity and positive and significant consumer loyalty. Research conducted by Siagian et al. (2021) on Oppo smartphone users shows that consumer loyalty is significantly influenced by brand equity. Research by Tamara and Putra (2021) on Pepsodent toothpaste consumers also shows that consumer loyalty is positively influenced significantly. Then the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H3: Brand Equity Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Consumer Loyalty in Samsung Smartphone Users in Indonesia.

Brand Equity Mediates the Effect of Quality Perception on Consumer Loyalty

Based on research by Siagian et al. (2021), the ability of quality perception to influence consumer loyalty will increase when mediated by brand equity compared to the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty directly. So it can be concluded that brand equity can mediate the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty. A similar study conducted by Wickremasinghe and Gamini (2020) on people who have used services at a children's hospital states the role of brand equity in mediating the influence between quality perception and consumer loyalty. Research by Lesmana et al. (2021) on Xiaomi brand smartphone users also states that brand equity mediates the influence between quality perceptions on consumer loyalty. Then the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H4: Brand Equity Mediates the Effect of Quality Perception on Consumer Loyalty Formation in Samsung Smartphone Users in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this study is a quantitative approach with survey methods. The survey was conducted through the distribution of questionnaires in the form of Google Form to potential respondents to obtain valid data. The population in this study is the community of Samsung brand smartphone users in Indonesia. Sampling from the population by applying certain criteria determined by researchers according to the research objectives (Suharyadi and Purwanto, 2018). The criteria applied include: (1) Samsung brand smartphone users and (2) previously used smartphones also come from the Samsung brand, because consumers who make repeat purchases at one brand show loyalty (Ramdani, 2022). The data analysis technique used in this study uses Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) with the help of the IBM SPSS AMOS 24 program.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

In the questionnaire, there is a section of filling in respondents' personal data which contains data on gender, age, domicile, and status. The results of a descriptive picture of respondents' characteristics are shown in the following table:

Karakteristik	Frekuensi	Persentase
Jenis Kelamin		
Laki-laki	31	22,6%
Perempuan	106	77,4%
Usia		
<17 tahun	2	1,5%
17-25 tahun	119	86,9%
26-35 tahun	10	7,3%
>35 tahun	6	4,4%
Domisili (Provinsi)		
Bali	1	0,7%
Banten	3	2,2%
Yogyakarta	3	2,2%
D.K.I. Jakarta	11	8,0%
Jawa Barat	14	10,2%
Jawa Tengah	94	68,6%
Jawa Timur	5	3,6%
Kalimantan Timur	1	0,7%
NTT	2	1,5%
Papua Barat	1	0,7%
Sumatera Selatan	2	1,5%
Status		
Pelajar/Mahasiswa	95	69,3%
Pekerja	36	26,3%
Lainnya	6	4,4%

Validity Test

According to Ferdinand (2006), validity testing is carried out using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with indicators said to be valid if they have a loading factor value of ≥ 0.50. The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for eight items of quality perception have good validity, brand equity of seven items have good validity, and consumer loyalty of six items have good validity. The results can be seen in the following table:

Item	Faktor *Loading*	Keterangan
Persepsi Kualitas		
PK1	0,780	Valid
PK2	0,720	Valid
PK3	0,837	Valid
PK4	0,796	Valid
PK5	0,701	Valid
PK6	0,733	Valid
PK7	0,849	Valid
PK8	0,798	Valid
Ekuitas Merek		
EM1	0,744	Valid
EM2	0,711	Valid
EM3	0,783	Valid
EM4	0,853	Valid
EM5	0,790	Valid
EM6	0,775	Valid
EM7	0,807	Valid
Loyalitas Konsumen		
LK1	0,825	Valid
LK2	0,841	Valid
LK3	0,821	Valid
LK4	0,754	Valid
LK5	0,762	Valid
LK6	0,798	Valid

Reliability Test

Reliability testing is aimed at determining the consistency of the indicators of statement indicators in the questionnaire. The results of reliability tests on each research variable are presented in the following table:

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha
Persepsi Kualitas	0,925
Ekuitas Merek	0,916
Loyalitas Konsumen	0,915

Goodness-of-Fit

Based on the table below, the error modification results provide an improvement in the goodness-of-fit model. CMIN/DF, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA values indicate a good level of conformity. Meanwhile, the GFI and AGFI indices have increased but have not met the criteria. For research models with the SEM approach, three to four indexes are required to provide sufficient evidence for a model to be accepted. In addition to the chi-square value (x 2) and degrees of freedom, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA 64 values must also be indicated. Some of these indices are considered sufficient to evaluate a model (Hair et al., 2010). So based on the test results, it can be concluded that the overall model is acceptable.

Indeks *Goodness of Fit*	Hasil yang Diharapkan	Hasil	Evaluasi Model
Chi-Square (x^2)	Diharapkan kecil	217,271	-
Degrees of freedom	Positif	165	Memenuhi
Probabilitas	$\geq 0,05$	0,004	Belum memenuhi
CMIN/DF	$\leq 2,00$	1,317	Memenuhi
GFI	$\geq 0,90$	0,855	Belum memenuhi
AGFI	$\geq 0,90$	0,796	Belum memenuhi
TLI	$\geq 0,95$	0,970	Memenuhi
CFI	$\geq 0,95$	0,977	Memenuhi
RMSEA	$\leq 0,08$	0,052	Memenuhi

Path Coefficient Analysis

The results of the coefficient analysis of this research path are shown in the following table:

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
EkuitasMerek	<---	PersepsiKualitas	1,198	0,142	8,426	0,000
LoyalitasKonsumen	<---	PersepsiKualitas	-0,087	0,228	-0,379	0,705
LoyalitasKonsumen	<---	EkuitasMerek	0,954	0,188	5,086	0,000

Based on the test results shown in the table above, it can be concluded that of the three paths analyzed, two of them show a significant influence seen from the magnitude of the significance level (P) of the hypothesis test which is smaller than 0.05. So it is further concluded that Quality Perception has a direct positive and significant influence on the

formation of Consumer Loyalty in Samsung brand smartphone users. The results in table IV.13 show that the P value for the variable of quality perception of consumer loyalty has a sig value. of $0.705 \geq 0.05$ with a C.R. value of $-0.379 \leq 1.96$. This value shows that the perception of 65 qualities does not have a positive and significant influence on consumer loyalty. So it is concluded that H1 is not supported.

Furthermore, Quality Perception has a positive and significant influence on Brand Equity in Samsung brand smartphone users. The results in table IV.13 show that the P value for the variable of quality perception of brand equity has a sig value. $0.000 \leq 0.05$ with a C.R. value of $8.426 \geq 1.96$. The value shows that the perception of quality affects brand equity positively and significantly. Then it is concluded that H2 is supported.

Next, Brand Equity has a positive and significant influence on Consumer Loyalty in Samsung brand smartphone users. The results in table IV.13 show the P value for the brand equity variable to consumer loyalty has a sig value. $0.000 \leq 0.05$ with a C.R. value of 5.086 ≥ 1.96. This value shows that there is a positive and significant influence of brand equity on consumer loyalty. So it is concluded that H3 is supported.

Finally, Brand Equity is proven to mediate the influence of Quality Perception on the formation of Consumer Loyalty in Samsung brand smartphone users. The results in table IV.13 show that the P value for quality perception of brand equity has a sig value. $0.000 \leq 0.05$ and P values for 66 variables of brand equity to consumer loyalty have SIG values. $0.000 \leq 0.05$. While in the variable section of quality perception of consumer loyalty shows the value of sig. by $0.705 \geq 0.05$. This means that brand equity fully mediates the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty, as quality perception variables have been shown to have a significant effect on brand equity, and brand equity variables on consumer loyalty have also proven significant. While the influence of quality perception variables on consumer loyalty proved to be insignificant. Full mediation occurs when the influence of the independent variable on the mediating variable is significant, the mediation variable on the dependent variable is significant, and the independent variable on the dependent variable is insignificant. So it was concluded that brand equity fully mediates the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty, so that H4 is declared supported.

DISCUSSION

The results proved that quality perception does not significantly affect consumer loyalty. Thus, the high or low perception of quality does not affect the formation of consumer loyalty

in Samsung smartphone users. This is possible because consumer perceptions or assessments tend to be the same in some smartphone brands, so that the perception of high quality and positive from consumers does not always continue to be loyal to a particular brand. Good quality as well as sufficient reliability and functional capabilities are considered reasonable in Samsung smartphone products, considering the price on products with the same specifications from other brand smartphones has a relatively higher price. These results support research from Siagian et al. (2021) which has previously proven that quality perception does not have a significant direct influence on consumer loyalty.

Furthermore,research shows that quality perception affects brand equity positively and significantly. Positive consumer perceptions or responses to the quality of Samsung smartphones will add strength and added value to the product. These results support research from Siagian et al. (2021) which has previously proven that quality perception affects brand equity significantly.

Next,research results prove that brand equity affects consumer loyalty positively and significantly. The higher the level of equity or power possessed by Samsung smartphones will further increase consumer loyalty. The strength or added value that Samsung smartphones have will help clear consumers' doubts to choose the product. These results support research from Siagian et al. (2021) which has previously proven that brand equity affects consumer loyalty significantly.

Finally,research shows that brand equity mediates the influence of perceived quality on consumer loyalty. Positive assessment from consumers of Samsung smartphones can increase the strength and added value of products and encourage the formation of a positive attitude of consumers to still choose and support the product even when faced with other alternatives. These results support research from Siagian et al. (2021) which has previously proven that brand equity mediates the influence between quality perceptions on consumer loyalty.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research obtained, it is known that brand equity fully mediates the influence of quality perception on consumer loyalty. In relation to these findings, the advice that can be given by researchers is that for future research it is expected to further maximize the distribution of samples in accordance with the research target. Respondents in this study are dominated from the western part of Indonesia, so further similar research can

be carried out with a more even distribution of samples or research specifically carried out in certain regions, especially central and eastern Indonesia. In addition, further research is expected to add other variables that affect consumer loyalty such as brand image (Faizal and Nurjanah, 2019), product quality (Hakim and Purwoko, 2019), brand trust (Tamara and Putra, 2021), product quality (Ramdani, 2022), and price perception (Ramadhanti and Sulistiono, 2022).

With regards to advice for Samsung Smartphone manufacturers based on research results, quality perception is proven to affect brand equity positively and significantly, and brand equity affects consumer loyalty positively and significantly. To increase consumer loyalty, it is recommended to maintain and increase brand equity. If you look at the average value of respondents' responses on the brand equity variable indicator, efforts that can be made by Samsung include creating advantages that other brands do not have, always trying to provide the best offers for consumers, and maintaining and improving product quality to shape the experience and positive consumer responses to Samsung smartphone products.

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