



## The Interplay of Brand Association, Perceived Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Fostering Brand Loyalty: A Case Study of Pediasure Customers in Pontianak

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### ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Brand Association, Perceived Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Loyalty

*Received : 18 December*

*Revised : 22 January*

*Accepted: 26 February*

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty among Pediasure consumers in Pontianak. Using PLS-SEM and a sample of 100 respondents, findings show that brand association significantly influences both customer satisfaction and loyalty. Perceived quality primarily impacts satisfaction, with limited direct influence on loyalty. Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand association and loyalty, but not between perceived quality and loyalty. These results highlight the crucial role of strong brand associations and high-quality products in fostering customer satisfaction, a key driver of brand loyalty, offering valuable insights for the nutritional product industry

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The escalating competition within the consumer goods sector, particularly in the nutritional products market, necessitates brands to focus on cultivating customer loyalty. As a prominent player in the child nutrition industry in Pontianak, Pediasure faces the challenge of not only attracting initial buyers but also ensuring consistent customer revisits. To achieve this, the factors of brand association, perceived quality, and customer satisfaction emerge as crucial determinants influencing brand loyalty.

Brand association refers to the cognitive and emotional connections that consumers develop toward a brand. Rivaldo et al. (2023) demonstrated that while brand association might not always directly influence brand loyalty, its impact is significant when mediated by customer satisfaction. Andik and Rachma (2022) further emphasized the direct and significant relationship between brand association and brand loyalty, underlining its importance in reinforcing a brand's image and consumer perceptions.

In Pediasure's case, the association with trust in child health, its alignment with parental aspirations for growth, and endorsements from medical professionals build strong brand connections. Wibisono et al. (2021) highlighted that brand reliability, which is strongly tied to brand association, plays a pivotal role in fostering loyalty. For example, Pediasure's endorsement by pediatricians serves as a psychological assurance for parents in Pontianak, encouraging consistent purchases.

Perceived quality is the customer's judgment of a product's overall excellence or superiority. Khasanah et al. (2022) and Raza et al. (2024) revealed that perceived quality significantly predicts customer loyalty by enhancing trust and satisfaction. In Pediasure's context, its scientifically backed nutritional value and demonstrated efficacy in supporting children's health are key contributors to perceived quality.

However, the impact of perceived quality may vary. Iqbal and Elahi (2024) found that perceived risk and customer engagement moderate its effect on loyalty. This finding is particularly relevant in Pontianak's price-sensitive market, where parents may weigh Pediasure's cost against its perceived benefits. Effective marketing communication to highlight these benefits, coupled with consistent quality delivery, becomes essential.

Customer satisfaction serves as both a direct determinant of loyalty and a mediating variable linking brand association and perceived quality to loyalty. Raza et al. (2024) identified customer satisfaction as a significant mediator in the perceived quality-loyalty relationship. Similarly, Saijunus and Herawati (2022) emphasized its role in mediating the relationship between brand association and loyalty.

For Pediasure, delivering on expectations—whether through consistent product efficacy, affordability, or customer service—is crucial in building satisfaction. In a dynamic market like Pontianak, satisfaction levels hinge on whether Pediasure aligns its offerings with the cultural and nutritional needs of the local population.

Additional studies provide further insights into these relationships. Akarawita (2022) explored how brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty, revealing that trust is a vital element in fostering loyalty, especially in sectors emphasizing reliability, such as child nutrition. Similarly, Rahmatulloh et al. (2019) highlighted that both brand image and perceived quality significantly influence loyalty through brand trust.

The role of digital platforms in shaping customer perceptions is also crucial. Damayanti and Indrawato (2023) demonstrated how social media quality and e-WOM influence revisit intentions and customer satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of online reputation management for brands like Pediasure.

Pontianak's consumer landscape, characterized by its diverse demographics and growing awareness of child nutrition, provides a fertile ground for exploring these dynamics. For Pediasure, leveraging brand associations, maintaining high perceived quality, and ensuring consistent customer satisfaction are integral strategies to bolster loyalty.

Building upon these theoretical and empirical insights, this study aims to examine the relationships among brand association, perceived quality, and customer satisfaction in influencing brand loyalty among Pediasure customers in Pontianak. By synthesizing findings from prior research (Rivaldo et al., 2023; Andik & Rachma, 2022; Raza et al., 2024), this research aspires to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing Pediasure's customer retention strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Brand Association and Its Theoretical Basis**

Brand association refers to the mental connections a customer makes with a brand, encompassing functional, emotional, and symbolic attributes (Aaker, 1991). These associations help customers differentiate the brand, create positive impressions, and establish trust. Strong brand associations enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty by shaping perceptions about quality, reliability, and emotional value (Wibisono et al., 2023; Rivaldo et al., 2023).

Previous studies highlight the impact of brand association on customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Rivaldo et al. (2023) found that while brand association may not directly affect loyalty, its indirect effect through customer satisfaction is significant. Similarly, Wibisono et al. (2023) emphasized that brand association builds reliability, which is a precursor to loyalty.

**H1: Brand association has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.**

**H2: Brand association has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.**

**H5: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty.**

### **Perceived Quality and Its Theoretical Basis**

Perceived quality is the customer's overall assessment of a product's excellence or superiority. It plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty by reducing perceived risks and enhancing trust in the brand (Khasanah et al., 2022; Raza et al., 2024). High perceived quality leads to increased satisfaction, which in turn fosters brand loyalty (Raza et al., 2024).

The literature supports the notion that perceived quality significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, Andik and Rachma (2022) demonstrated that perceived quality directly affects brand loyalty, while Khasanah et al. (2022) found that customer satisfaction mediates this relationship.

**H3: Perceived quality has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.**

**H4: Perceived quality has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.**

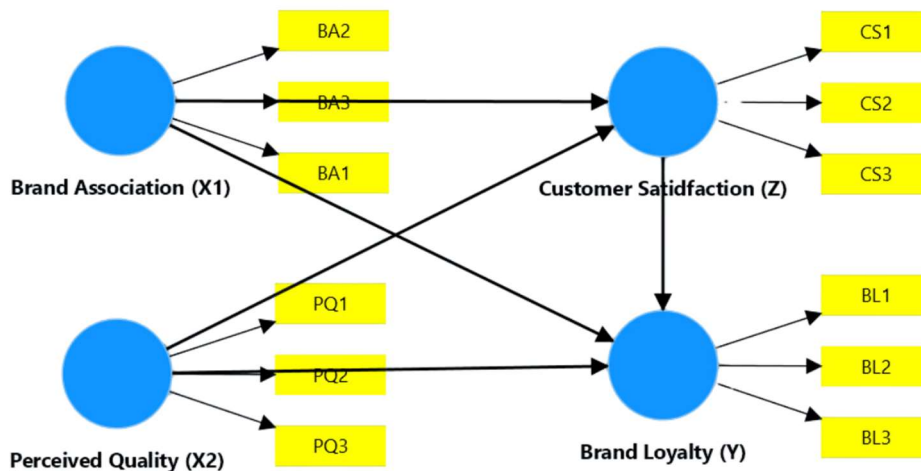
**H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty.**

### Customer Satisfaction and Its Mediating Role

Customer satisfaction represents the degree to which a product or service meets or exceeds customer expectations. It serves as both a direct driver of loyalty and a mediating variable between independent variables (e.g., brand association, perceived quality) and loyalty (Raza et al., 2024; Saijunus & Herawati, 2022). Satisfied customers are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors, such as repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth referrals (Raza et al., 2024).

Customer satisfaction's mediating role has been extensively documented. Raza et al. (2024) found that satisfaction strengthens the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty, while Saijunus and Herawati (2022) demonstrated a similar effect between brand association and loyalty.

**H7: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.**



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to analyze the relationships between brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty in the context of Pediasure consumers in Pontianak. A survey-based approach is used, allowing for the collection of numerical data to test the hypotheses. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS is employed to evaluate both direct and indirect relationships among the variables.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this research consists of Pediasure customers in Pontianak. The sample includes 100 respondents selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for inclusion are:

1. Respondents must be current or past customers of Pediasure.
2. Respondents must have purchased Pediasure products within the last 12 months.
3. Respondents must reside in Pontianak city.

The sample size of 100 is adequate for SEM analysis, ensuring sufficient statistical power and model reliability.

**Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed online and in-person. The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' perceptions of brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. It included:

1. Demographic Information: Age, gender, income level, and frequency of Pediasure purchases.
2. Variables: Items measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

**Operationalization of Variables**

Table 1. Operationalization of Variables

Variable Name	Theoretical Definition	Operational Definition	Indicators
Brand Association (X1)	Mental connections customers make with a brand (Aaker, 1991).	Positive associations with Pediasure related to trust, quality, and image.	1. Product attributes 2. Benefits 3. Brand identity (Wibisono et al., 2023).
Perceived Quality (X2)	Customer's overall assessment of product excellence (Zeithaml, 1988).	Perceived superiority of Pediasure in terms of nutritional value and taste.	1. Reliability 2. Consistency 3. Customer satisfaction (Raza et al., 2024).
Customer Satisfaction (Z)	Degree to which customer expectations are met (Oliver, 1997).	Customer contentment with Pediasure's products and services.	1. Expectations 2. Value perception 3. Repeated purchase intent (Saijunus & Herawati, 2022).
Brand Loyalty (Y)	Customers' commitment to repurchase or recommend the brand (Aaker, 1991).	Repeated purchases of Pediasure and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.	1. Repeat purchase 2. Advocacy 3. Emotional attachment (Raza et al., 2024).

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS, which is particularly suitable for analyzing complex relationships between latent variables. The analysis process included:

1. Measurement Model Evaluation: Assessing construct reliability, validity, and factor loadings.
2. Structural Model Evaluation: Testing direct and indirect effects among variables.
3. Bootstrapping Calculation: Evaluating the significance of path coefficients using 5,000 resamples.

**RESULTS**

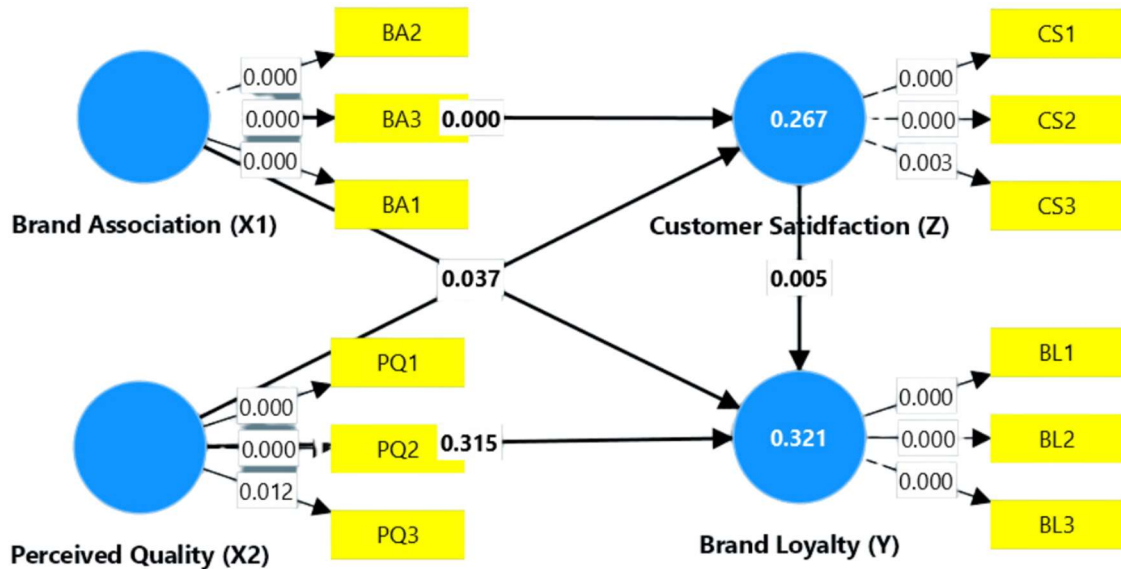
The analysis conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS provides an in-depth understanding of the relationships between brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty among Pediasure customers in Pontianak. The findings reveal significant insights into how these variables interact and influence customer behavior.

Table 2. Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

Relationship	Path Coefficient (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistics	P-Value
Brand Association (X1) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.238	0.241	0.114	2.086	0.037
Brand Association (X1) → Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.486	0.487	0.086	5.656	0.000
Customer Satisfaction (Z) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.366	0.366	0.131	2.790	0.005
Perceived Quality (X2) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.103	0.084	0.111	0.102	0.839
Perceived Quality (X2) → Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.103	0.100	0.040	2.575	0.010

Table 3. Mediation Analysis

Indirect Path	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value
Brand Association (X1) → Customer Satisfaction (Z) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.178	2.412	0.016
Perceived Quality (X2) → Customer Satisfaction (Z) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.084	0.793	0.428



Picture 2. SEM

Brand association was found to have a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty, with a path coefficient of 0.238 ( $p = 0.037$ ). This indicates that a strong cognitive and emotional connection with the brand fosters customer loyalty. This finding aligns with prior research by Saijunus and Herawati (2022) and Rivaldo et al. (2023), emphasizing the role of brand identity and reputation in repeat purchases and customer retention. Similarly, brand association also significantly influenced customer satisfaction, as evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.486 ( $p = 0.000$ ). Customers with positive associations perceive the brand as trustworthy and high-quality, leading to greater satisfaction levels. This is consistent with studies such as Raza et al. (2024), which highlight the importance of strong brand positioning.

Customer satisfaction emerged as a significant predictor of brand loyalty, with a path coefficient of 0.366 ( $p = 0.005$ ). This finding reinforces the theory that satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal and recommend the brand to others, as supported by Chodriyah et al. (2023). For Pediasure, satisfaction derived from the brand's nutritional benefits and reliable performance strengthens long-term customer relationships. Additionally, perceived quality was shown to have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 0.103 ( $p = 0.010$ ). This finding aligns with research by Khasanah et al. (2022) and Raza et al. (2024), underscoring the critical role of product performance in driving customer satisfaction.

However, the direct relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty was not significant (path coefficient = 0.103,  $p = 0.839$ ). This contrasts with findings from studies such as Andik and Rachma (2022), suggesting that for Pediasure customers, factors such as emotional attachment and competitive dynamics might play a more prominent role in fostering loyalty than perceived quality alone.

The mediation analysis further highlights the importance of customer satisfaction. It was found that customer satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty, with an indirect effect

of 0.178 ( $p = 0.016$ ). This result emphasizes the necessity for positive brand associations to translate into satisfying customer experiences to cultivate loyalty effectively, as supported by Raza et al. (2024). On the other hand, customer satisfaction did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty (path coefficient = 0.084,  $p = 0.428$ ). While perceived quality contributes to satisfaction, its influence on loyalty may be diluted by other factors such as marketing strategies or alternative product offerings.

In summary, the findings underscore the pivotal role of brand association and customer satisfaction in driving brand loyalty. While perceived quality positively influences satisfaction, its impact on loyalty appears less pronounced, indicating that emotional and experiential factors might hold greater weight in customer retention. These insights suggest that to optimize loyalty, Pediasure should balance its focus on branding strategies, enhancing customer satisfaction, and maintaining product quality. The results offer actionable recommendations for marketing practitioners and strategists seeking to build stronger customer relationships.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the relationships among brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty, particularly in the context of Pediasure customers in Pontianak. By analyzing these variables through PLS-SEM, we can better understand the interplay of factors that drive customer satisfaction and loyalty in the competitive landscape of nutritional products.

### **The Role of Brand Association in Building Loyalty and Satisfaction**

Brand association emerged as a significant factor influencing both customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The path coefficient of 0.238 ( $p = 0.037$ ) for the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty indicates that customers who have strong and positive associations with Pediasure are more likely to remain loyal. Positive brand associations, such as trustworthiness, high-quality nutritional benefits, and emotional connection, create a foundation for customer loyalty. This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as Saijunus and Herawati (2022), which emphasize that brand association fosters a psychological attachment, driving repeat purchases and reducing brand switching behavior.

Additionally, brand association had a strong impact on customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 0.486 ( $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that when customers perceive a brand positively, their overall satisfaction with the product and the brand increases. For Pediasure, customers may associate the brand with reliable health benefits, child-focused nutrition, and a positive corporate reputation, all of which enhance satisfaction. Research by Raza et al. (2024) supports this view, highlighting that brand association is a critical determinant of satisfaction in consumer decision-making processes. These findings underscore the need for Pediasure to continuously strengthen its brand image through targeted marketing strategies that emphasize its nutritional value and trustworthiness.

### **The Influence of Perceived Quality on Satisfaction and Loyalty**

Perceived quality significantly influenced customer satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.103,  $p = 0.010$ ), aligning with studies by Khasanah et al. (2022) and Raza et al. (2024). High perceived quality, particularly in nutritional products like Pediasure, reassures customers of the product's efficacy and reliability, leading to increased satisfaction. This finding underscores the importance of maintaining stringent quality standards, as any perceived compromise in quality could negatively impact customer perceptions and satisfaction.

However, the direct relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty was not significant (path coefficient = 0.103,  $p = 0.839$ ). This result contrasts with findings from Andik and Rachma (2022) and suggests that while perceived quality is essential for satisfaction, it may not be sufficient to directly drive loyalty in the absence of strong emotional or experiential connections. In the case of Pediasure, loyalty may depend more on brand trust, emotional attachment, or customer experience rather than just product quality. This highlights an opportunity for Pediasure to explore additional drivers of loyalty, such as personalized customer engagement or innovative marketing campaigns.

#### **Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator**

Customer satisfaction played a critical mediating role between brand association and brand loyalty, with an indirect effect of 0.178 ( $p = 0.016$ ). This finding aligns with Raza et al. (2024), emphasizing that brand associations must translate into satisfying customer experiences to cultivate loyalty effectively. For Pediasure, this suggests that while positive brand associations are necessary, they must be complemented by excellent customer experiences, such as responsive customer service and consistent product performance, to build loyalty.

Conversely, customer satisfaction did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty (path coefficient = 0.084,  $p = 0.428$ ). This result indicates that while perceived quality contributes to satisfaction, its impact on loyalty may be limited by other factors, such as competitive dynamics or alternative product availability. Pediasure might need to enhance its differentiation strategy by emphasizing unique product attributes or leveraging emotional marketing to strengthen the quality-loyalty link.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for Pediasure and similar brands operating in the nutritional product market. First, strengthening brand associations through targeted advertising, social proof (e.g., testimonials), and community engagement can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, campaigns that emphasize Pediasure's proven nutritional benefits and its role in child development could further build trust and emotional connection with customers.

Second, maintaining high product quality is essential, but it should be complemented by strategies that address emotional and experiential aspects. For instance, creating personalized experiences through customer feedback

programs or loyalty initiatives could strengthen the quality-satisfaction-loyalty pathway.

Lastly, customer satisfaction should be prioritized as a central metric for evaluating business performance. Regular customer surveys and feedback mechanisms can help identify areas of improvement, ensuring that positive brand associations and perceived quality translate into meaningful satisfaction and loyalty.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the significance of customer satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between brand-related variables and loyalty. It highlights the importance of integrating emotional and cognitive factors, such as brand association and perceived quality, into frameworks for understanding customer behavior. Furthermore, the findings suggest that in markets where product quality is often taken for granted, emotional and experiential drivers may play a more critical role in fostering loyalty.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The focus on Pediasure customers in Pontianak may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or product categories. Future research could explore similar relationships in other geographical or cultural contexts to validate these results. Additionally, incorporating other variables, such as brand trust or customer engagement, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of loyalty dynamics.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical roles of brand association and customer satisfaction in driving brand loyalty. For Pediasure, leveraging these insights through strategic marketing and customer engagement initiatives can help strengthen customer relationships and sustain competitive advantage in the nutritional product market.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout the completion of this research. First and foremost, I thank Allah SWT for granting me strength, perseverance, and insight throughout this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my academic advisors and mentors for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement during the course of this research. Their expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping this study.

Special thanks go to the respondents and participants of this study for their cooperation and willingness to provide the data necessary for the analysis. Without their contributions, this research would not have been possible.

Finally, I acknowledge the support of my colleagues and peers for their suggestions and constructive discussions that have enriched this study. This work is a testament to the collective efforts and contributions of many individuals.

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