

The Role of Brand Trust in Mediating Brand Awareness, Perceived Service Quality, and Perceived Value on Customer Preference in Digital Telecom Services

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Customer Preference, Brand Awareness, Perceived Service Quality, Perceived Value, Brand Trust

Received : 08, February

Revised : 14, March

Accepted: 28, April

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of brand awareness, perceived service quality and perceived value on customer preference with brand trust as a mediator in Telkom's digital telecommunications services. Using SmartPLS version 4 with 117 respondents who are B2B customers in West Sumatra. The results show that there are mixed findings, namely that the direct and indirect paths are not all statistically significant. The findings indicate that in the B2B telecommunications context, branding and value serve as hygiene factors that do not motivate B2B preference due to the status quo bias of long-term contracts. Implications: Telkom prioritizes operational SLA over value branding.

INTRODUCTION

Within Indonesia's fast-growing digital economy, the telecommunications industry has evolved into a key driver of business transformation rather than merely serving as a provider of basic connectivity. In this context, Telkom has assumed a strategic role by delivering integrated digital solutions to Business to Business (B2B) customers across the business, enterprise, and government segments. The rapid pace of digital transformation has further stimulated the adoption of advanced technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data Analytics, and Cloud Computing, which contribute to improved operational efficiency, process optimization, and enhanced value creation for customers (Babar et al., 2023).

Based on the 2024 annual report of Telkom, the number of B2B customers nationwide reached 594,638, while the data, internet, and IT services segment recorded a year-on-year growth of 3.5% in 2024. The B2B business segment accounted for 14% of Telkom's total revenue, equivalent to IDR 20.6 trillion, highlighting its growing strategic importance within the company's overall performance. These figures suggest that customer preferences toward digital telecommunications providers are increasingly influenced by the perceived quality of digital solutions and the level of trust placed in service providers.

At the regional level, the number of B2B customers in West Sumatra increases substantially from 274 in 2023 to 701 in 2025. Despite this upward trend in customer numbers, the growth rate decreases to 44.0% in 2025, indicating moderation in expansion. These dynamics may reflect increasing competition among service providers or shifting customer preferences in regional telecommunications market. Variations in market share do not necessarily align with the pace of customer growth, as they are largely influenced by overall market dynamics. This trend can be observed in the performance of Telkom's market share in the West Sumatra region, which stood at 80.3% in 2023, then decreased to 75.1% in 2024, and increased again to 76.5% in 2025.

In the telecommunications industry, customer preferences are influenced by several factors, including network quality, pricing, perceived service value, brand reputation, corporate image, and the emotional experiences associated with the brand. Research by (Demirel, 2022) indicates that companies that are responsive to customer preferences through improvements in service quality and perceived value tend to achieve higher customer satisfaction, which subsequently strengthens loyalty and long-term retention. In the marketing, brand awareness is widely recognized as a key determinant of customer preferences (Bańbuła, 2024). A customer's ability to recognize and recall a brand forms the basis for deeper relational outcomes, including loyalty.

Establishing brand trust is essential, as it forms a vital link between brand recognition and the customer's ultimate choice. Strong trust can greatly encourage customers to consistently select a brand's offerings (Chokpitakkul et al., 2020). In the digital age, perceived service quality frequently emerges as a crucial factor influencing customer choices, with elements like service responsiveness, access quality, and system reliability being particularly influential (Widagdo et al., 2023). Meanwhile, perceived value acts as a

key differentiator, guiding customers away from a sole focus on price towards a greater emphasis on value orientation or perceived superiority (Mehrotra & Menon, 2021).

Research in the telecommunications industry has predominantly concentrated on technical elements like network performance, service quality, and technological advancements (Nugraha & Wasesa, 2021), (Saadi et al., 2020), and (Mehrotra & Menon, 2021). However, there is a scarcity of studies that explore customer behavior and preferences from a brand perspective, especially concerning Telkom's B2B customer segment, which remains largely unexamined. This study aims to fill the gap by focusing on B2B customers of Telkom's telecommunications and digital services.

Based on the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell consumer behavior model, this study enriches the theory by integrating brand awareness, perceived service quality, perceived value, brand trust, and customer preference within an integrated structural model that captures the key cognitive and affective processes underlying organizational decision-making in the digital telecommunications context. Empirically, the study provides new insights on the relative effect of these antecedents on brand trust and customer preference, while assessing the mediating role of trust in transmitting the effects of brand awareness, perceived service quality, and perceived value on B2B customers' service choices. Focusing on Telkom's B2B customers in West Sumatra, these findings offer practical implications for marketing strategy, relationship management, and digital service development.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Consumer Behavior Theory

Consumer Behavior Theory provides the essential framework for understanding the process by which individuals identify their needs, gather information, evaluate various options, and form preferences for a particular brand or service. According to (Reina Paz & Rodríguez Vargas, 2023), the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model views consumer behavior as a sequence of decision-making stages, including the recognition of a problem, the search for information, the evaluation of alternatives, the decision to purchase, and the evaluation after the purchase. This process is shaped not only by logical factors but also by the experiences, perceptions, knowledge, beliefs, and emotions associated with a brand.

(Schiffman & Kanuk, 2018) assert that customer preferences develop gradually, shaped by the evaluation of past experiences and impressions from various service interactions. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) elaborate that these preferences are the result of the dynamic interaction between perception, service experiences, and brand beliefs. When customers perceive a brand as trustworthy and honest, they are more likely to consistently choose and engage with it (Solomon, 2017). Consequently, these psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping customer preferences.

Brand Awareness and Customer Preference

According to (Ebrahim et al., 2016), customer preferences are a contextual reflection of consumers' inclinations to select particular goods or services. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) found that brand preference is a particular type of customer preference, supporting the theory. To put it another way, customer preferences at the brand level are derived from or elaborated upon by brand preference. Research conducted by (Cano-Lanza et al., 2025) indicates that consumers are more likely to choose brands they are already familiar with when making purchasing decisions. An increase in brand awareness correlates with a higher probability of customers considering and favoring those brands.

In this scenario, brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping brand preference, which is synonymous with customer preference (Abdou, 2025). From a branding perspective, conceptually customer preference can be seen as equivalent to brand preference. As research (Chokpitakkul et al., 2020) explains that brand awareness has a direct effect through brand image formation, as well as an indirect effect through a series of brand image variables, satisfaction, brand trust, and commitment to brand preference, brand loyalty, and word of mouth. Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H1: The effect of brand awareness on customer preference.

Perceived Service Quality and Customer Preference

Research by (Nugraha & Wasesa, 2021) in the telecommunications industry, indicate that service quality is a key determinant of customer preference, especially among premium quality seekers who place greater emphasis on superior network performance, after-sales support, and service expertise than on low pricing. Perceived service quality, encompassing the dimensions of delivery reliability, food quality, and service performance, has been shown to significantly shape customer preferences when selecting food delivery services (Chandrasekhar et al., 2019). Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H2: The effect of perceived service quality on customer preference.

Perceived Value and Customer Preference

Customers consider a reasonable price level, service quality that is balanced with the cost, and perceived added value to be the main factors in shaping customer preference for a service (Chandrasekhar et al., 2019). When a brand is perceived to provide good value for money, that brand tends to be the preferred choice, so that perceived value acts as a rational basis that drives the formation of preferences and brand selection decisions (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). This study does not directly test the relationship between perceived value and customer preference in the model. Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H3: The effect of perceived value on customer preference.

Brand Trust and Customer Preference

A bibliometric study by (Sakshi et al., 2025) identified brand trust as a significant factor in shaping customer preferences. When customers have a high

level of trust in a brand, they are more likely to remain loyal and favor that telecommunications service (Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021). Although the direct effect of brand trust on loyalty was insignificant, path analysis results indicated that its role as a mediator between customer perception, preference, and brand commitment was very strong (Chokpitakkul et al., 2020). Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H4: The effect of brand trust on customer preference.

Brand Awareness and Brand Trust

Reserach by (Uzir et al., 2025) explained that path analysis revealed that brand awareness has a positive and significant impact on brand trust. Brand awareness acts as a driving factor in brand choice, enabling consumers to recall and recognize a particular brand. On the other hand, (Deka et al., 2020) suggests that an increase in brand awareness, which includes aspects such as recall, recognition, and brand differentiation, results in a heightened level of customer trust in the brand, known as brand trust. Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H5: The effect of brand awareness on brand trust.

Perceived Service Quality and Brand Trust

According to (Uzir et al., 2025) perceived service quality is closely related to customer satisfaction, which ultimately has a significant impact on brand trust. Therefore, perceptions of service quality play a key role in building trust, primarily through achieving customer satisfaction. The effect of perceived service quality extends to brand trust, which subsequently impacts customer satisfaction and will effect brand loyalty (Zehir et al., 2011). The study assessed dimensions such as reliability, enthusiasm, sensitivity, tangible features, and trust (Demirel, 2022). Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows: H6: The effect of perceived service quality on brand trust.

Perceived Value and Brand Trust

Perceived value demonstrates a positive and significant effect on brand trust. When customers perceive that the benefits and quality of a product or service outweigh the costs or efforts involved, they tend to develop stronger confidence in the brand's reliability and integrity (Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021). In this context, higher perceived value not only enhances customers' trust but also reinforces their positive evaluation of the brand's overall performance and credibility (Monfort et al., 2025). Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H7: The effect of perceived value on brand trust.

Mediation Role of Brand Trust

(Chokpitakkul et al., 2020) explains that brand trust serves a crucial mediating function by linking customer satisfaction to brand commitment, before consumers form a preference for one brand over its competitors. Brand trust is widely recognized as a mediating in preference formation (Sakshi et al.,

2025). Research by (Chandrasekhar et al., 2019) focused on comparing factors influencing preferences and selection of food delivery services, but did not examine the role of brand trust as a mediating between perceived service quality and customer preference. According to (Widagdo et al., 2023) and (Mehrotra & Menon, 2021), brand trust does not have a mediating effect on the relationship between perceived service quality and customer preference.

Previous studies (Monfort et al., 2025) found that perceived value positively and significantly effects brand trust, although the study did not explicitly examine the mediating role of brand trust between perceived value and customer preference (Chandrasekhar et al., 2019). Meanwhile, (Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021) emphasize that a higher level of perceived value enhances brand trust, which consequently strengthens customer preference toward the brand. Then, the researcher formulated hypothesis as follows:

H8: Brand trust mediates brand awareness and customer preference.

H9: Brand trust mediates perceived service quality and customer preference.

H10: Brand trust mediates perceived value and customer preference.

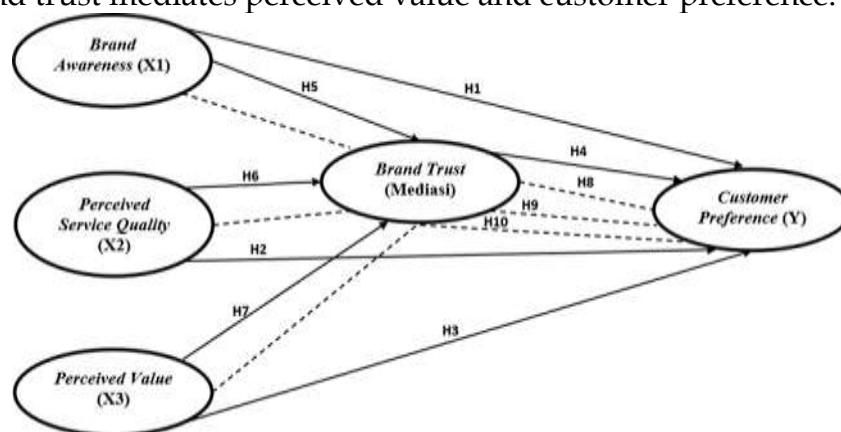


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Population and Sample

The study adopts a quantitative approach and applies a survey method for data collection. According to (Sugiyono, 2018) the quantitative approach emphasizes objective measurement and empirical analysis to examine relationship among variables. The study focuses on B2B customers of Telkom's digital telecommunications services in West Sumatra, which includes the Business, Enterprise, and Government subsegments. The population consists of 165 customers. To ensure representativeness, respondents were selected using probability sampling with a simple random sampling technique. Based on the Slovin Formula, the minimum required sample size was determined to be respondents. The respondents consisted of decision makers or technical recommendation providers who were active customers as of October 2025 and utilized integrated solutions such as Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and data services.

Data Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The analytical process commenced with descriptive analysis by calculating the Respondent Achievement Level (TCR) to summarize respondent perceptions. Subsequently, a multivariate analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to estimate and evaluate the constructs within the research framework, utilizing SmartPLS software (Hair et al., 2022). Model assessment was carried out in two sequential stages. The measurement model (outer model) was examined to confirm construct validity and reliability, while the structural model (inner model) was analysed to evaluate the relationships among variables, as indicated by the coefficient of determination (R-squared). Hypothesis testing, including the examination of brand trust as a mediating variable, was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure, with statistical significance assessed based on t-statistic and p-value.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis Results

(Sugiyono, 2018) states that the purpose of descriptive analysis is to outline the features of each variable on its own, without taking into account their mutual effects. To assess how respondents perceive the questionnaire items, the TCR (Respondent Achievement Level) value was derived using predefined criteria for score interpretation:

Table 1. TCR Score Interpretation Criteria

TCR Score	Description
0 – 35%	Not Good
36 – 50%	Less Good
51 – 65%	Quite Good
66 – 85%	Good
86 – 100 %	Very Good

In describing research variables, it is crucial to outline the state of the research subject without drawing comparisons or associating it with other variables. The table below shows the respondents' answers for variables Brand Awareness (X1), Perceived Service Quality (X2), Perceived Value (X3), Brand Trust (Mediation) and Customer Preference (Y):

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

No.	Variables	Mean	TCR Score	Category
1	Customer Preference	4.09	81.7%	Good
2	Brand Awareness	4.06	81.2%	Good
3	Perceived Service Quality	4.12	82.3%	Good
4	Perceived Value	4.15	83.0%	Good
5	Brand Trust	4.17	83.4%	Good

Source: Primary Data 2026

According to the table above, customer preference for Telkom's digital telecommunications services recorded an average value of 4.09, with a TCR of 81.7%. This rating is deemed to be 'good'. Brand awareness obtained an average value of 4.06 with a TCR of 81.2%, which is categorized as good. Perceived service quality obtained an average value of 4.12 with a TCR of 82.3%, which means it is in the 'good' category. Perceived value obtained an average value of 4.15 with a TCR of 83.0%, meaning it is in the 'good' category. Finally, brand trust obtained an average value of 4.17 with a TCR of 83.4%, which is categorized as 'good'.

Hypothesis Test Results

In SEM-PLS analysis, hypothesis testing involves evaluating the structural model, also known as the inner model, by examining the path coefficient, p-value, and t-statistic derived from bootstrapping. A hypothesis is accepted or rejected based on these criteria: a p-value must be 0.05 or less, and the t-statistic should be 1.96 or higher (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Description
Brand Awareness -> Customer Preference	-0,082	0,978	0,328	Rejected
Perceived Service Quality -> Customer Preference	0,297	2,622	0,009	Accepted
Perceived Value -> Customer Preference	0,146	1,052	0,293	Rejected
Brand Trust -> Customer Preference	0,498	3,625	0,000	Accepted
Brand Awareness -> Brand Trust	0,288	3,231	0,001	Accepted
Perceived Service Quality -> Brand Trust	0,394	3,519	0,000	Accepted
Perceived Value -> Brand Trust	0,281	1,906	0,057	Rejected
Brand Awareness -> Brand Trust -> Customer Preference	0,144	2,612	0,009	Accepted
Perceived Service Quality -> Brand Trust -> Customer Preference	0,196	2,584	0,010	Accepted

Perceived Value -> Brand Trust -> Customer Preference	0,140	1,589	0,112	Rejected
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Source: Primary Data 2026

DISCUSSION

In order to test the study hypothesis, the following statistical processing findings are generated following data analysis utilizing the PLS-SEM analysis technique:

Brand awareness has a negative but insignificant impact on customer preference, according to the SEM-PLS analysis's findings, which is also supported by (Tolba, 2011) and (Akyol & Yıldız, 2016). This suggests that increased brand awareness does not always affect customer preference. Customer who are only aware of a brand in the marketplace or who are accustomed to commercials or business logos are not persuaded to select or stick with a particular brand. In this study, a particular type of customer preference is brand preference.

The test findings demonstrate that customer preference is positively and significantly impacted by perceived service quality. This suggests that customer preferences based on customer experience are stronger when Telkom's digital telecoms services operate better. Additionally, research (Nugraha & Wasesa, 2021) demonstrates that for some consumer demographics, service quality is a crucial selection factor in telecommunications firms. The study is also pertinent to (Chandrasekhar et al., 2019), which clarifies that quality is a crucial factor when determining customer preferences.

Perceived value effects customer preference in a positive but insignificant way, according to the SEM-PLS analysis results. Perceived value's insignificant on customer preference is consistent with earlier research findings (Kim et al., 2012), which shown that perceived value frequently needs to be mediated by customer satisfaction or relationship quality in order to have a meaningful impact and shape brand preference as a key driver of purchasing decisions. This is consistent with the insignificant effect of perceived value on customer preference.

According to test results, customer preference is positively and significantly impacted by brand trust. The results of (Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021), (Chokpitakkul et al., 2020) and (Sakshi et al., 2025), which discovered that brand trust can considerably boost preference, are supported by this. Customers are more likely to prioritize Telkom's digital telecoms services when they have greater faith in a brand. Long-term loyalty to a brand's services may be impacted by trust that fosters preference.

Consistent with earlier studies by (Uzir et al., 2025) and (Deka et al., 2020), test results indicate that brand awareness has a positive and significant impact on brand trust. Customers are more likely to trust a brand or service if it is well-known. According to researchers, giving a brand priority in consumers' perceptions fosters confidence and belief, which are the cornerstones of trust. In this situation, customers are more likely to trust and maintain loyal to well-known and reputable brands than to other providers.

The test results showed that brand trust is positively and significantly impacted on perceived service quality. Customers' trust in a brand increase with perceived service quality. Customers might be persuaded that a brand is capable and trustworthy by consistent and high-quality service. This conclusion is supported by (Demirel, 2022) and (Zehir et al., 2011), who emphasize that customers need confirmation of the brand's reliability, and therefore perceived service quality is important to building brand trust.

Perceived value has a positive but insignificant effect on brand trust, according to the SEM-PLS analysis results. This indicates that increasing perceived value has insufficient impact to significantly increase brand trust. This conclusion is confirmed by earlier studies (Mizukoshi, 2025) and (Saadi et al., 2020), which argue that supporting elements such service consistency, historical reputation, and proven operational experience are necessary for the formation of brand trust rather than perceived value only.

The research findings demonstrate that customer preference is positively and significantly impacted by brand awareness, which is mediated by brand trust. Customer preference increases with brand awareness and brand trust. Customers are going to feel more secure and trusting when they are familiar with a brand. Additionally, (Sakshi et al., 2025) and (Chokpitakkul et al., 2020) explain that a key mediator in the consumer process of assessing brand information, including brand awareness, to become a customer preference is brand trust.

According to the research results, that customer preference is positively and significantly effected on perceived service quality, which is mediated by brand trust. Stronger brand trust results from higher and better perceived service quality, which eventually increases customer preference. According to related study (Zehir et al., 2011), brand trust contributes to the conversion of service quality perceptions into sustained preference and loyalty. The study's findings deviate from the original hypothesis of a number of research that did not look at brand trust as a mediating factor.

Research has show that neither directly nor indirectly through brand trust, perceived value has no effect on customer preference. This explains why mediation is ineffective in the case of B2B telecommunications, even though perceived value is nearly crucial in fostering brand trust. This result is consistent with (Becker, 2023), who demonstrated a weak and insignificant mediation effect in a comparable SEM-PLS model, but it differs from other consumer studies that demonstrate considerable mediation of brand trust. The frequent status quo bias in B2B (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988) is another explanation for the lack of mediation finding. Additionally, the theory's adaptation views perceived value as a hygiene factor—that is, a fundamental requirement that maintains customers satisfied but is insufficient to drive shifts in consumer preferences in a competitive marketplace (Herzberg et al., 1959).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance customer preference, companies should prioritize improving their operational performance by ensuring adherence to service level agreements (SLAs), maintaining robust network reliability, swiftly addressing outages, and

delivering high-quality after-sales service. Given that B2B customers often stick with their service providers for extended periods, it is crucial for companies to regularly update their customer support initiatives to better align with these customers' needs. Establishing brand trust should be based on concrete performance outcomes rather than relying solely on marketing communications, highlighting the essential role of Account Managers or Telkom's marketing team in this process.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could consider adding or replacing the variables studied, particularly those that better reflect the reality of B2B customer decision-making. In addition, comparative studies between B2B and B2C (Business to Consumer) segments can be conducted, both within a single company and between various service providers. Future research designs could also use a longitudinal approach, such as monitoring customers before and after contract renewals or the implementation of specific service programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This section gave you the opportunities to present gratitude to your colleagues who provide suggestions for your papers. You can also convey your appreciation to the financial grants you are accepting, making this paper.

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