

Linking Marketing Positioning and Consumer Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Effect of Price Perception

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how marketing positioning factors such as product quality, price perception, value proposition, and special features impact consumer brand loyalty in FMCG market. Moreover, this study also determines whether price perception mediated the relationship between product quality and brand loyalty. There are 102 consumers in Selangor involved in this study chosen based on simple random sampling. Standard multiple regression and mediating analysis using SPSS Process Macro Model 4 were used for data analysis. The findings demonstrated that 59.8% of consumer brand loyalty for FMCG product is influenced by product quality, price perception, and value proposition. In addition, the finding reveals that product quality has a significant effect on customer brand loyalty through price perception. This indicates that the customers in the FMCG market prefers to purchase high-quality FMCG products in discounted rates or reasonable price which enhance perceived value and direct them to present brand loyalty. This study suggested that FMCG manufacturers should try to increase customer involvement and perception towards the brand by setting reasonable price and clearly differentiate their brand from competitive brands by showing why and how it is better than alternative brands.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Product Quality, Price Perception, Value Proposition, Special Features

Introduction

Fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry serves as a cornerstone of the global economy, encompassing a wide range of products that are consumed on a daily basis. In Malaysia, around one-fifth of Malaysian household consumption expenditure is spent on the FMCG segment, making it one of the most important sectors in the industry (Siddharta, 2024). Despite the higher prices, Malaysian consumers were willing to spend more on their current lifestyle (Siddharta, 2024). This indicates that they would still spend on essentials like food and beverages, and consumer demand would be a lifeline even during the inflation. It would also appear that since the FMCG industry is all about feeding the basic needs and wants of

consumers, the industry is fairly shielded from the economic slowdown. A study by the Department of Statistic Malaysia concluded that, Malaysian consumers prefer more essential items rather than 'luxury' items whereby few demands of the items were in negative growth (chocolate and sweets – minus 17%, alcohol – minus 17%, and personal & beauty products – minus 12%) (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2023).

Companies that produce FMCG are identified through their ability to supply the products needed by consumers, as well as creating a sense of trust and loyalty in customers (Oktavenia & Martini, 2024). Brand loyalty has always been important, but in a world of near-perfect information and ever-increasing choices, it is more valuable than ever. In fact, brand loyalty is now one of the few sustainable sources of competitive advantage. Brand loyalty enhance the brand extension, their price per share also increased along with the minimise the cost and also create brand more powerful in the market (Singh & Banerjee, 2021). There is also the benefit of trade leverage, which guarantees preferential shelf space for a preferred brand, as well as gives a company more time to react to rival movements (Venkatasalam & Karunakaran, 2021). A strong base of loyal customers provides a buffer during economic downturns or market fluctuations. These customers are more likely to continue their patronage even in challenging times, providing a level of business stability.

FMCG companies tend to be similar in many ways leading to high competition in pricing, product, and promotion innovation so that their products can remain relevant (de Calvalho et al., 2020). Companies operating within this sector are characterised by low profit margins and high-volume business (Akir & Othman, 2020). As a result, FMCG companies are actually produce highly competitive goods with a high turnover rate and focus their efforts on the 4P's of marketing in order to attract customers. They spend heavily on promotion to create distinguishable brands; use complex logistics and distribution systems to maximise placement in trade; innovate around the product and packaging due to shelf-life; and keep pricing low in order to incentivise consumers (Leung et al., 2022).

The advent of digitalisation and the proliferation of social media platforms have revolutionised the marketing landscape. Faruk et al. (2021) noted that few consumers behavior would become permanent due to a transition to digital channel, changing of brand loyalty and 'in-homing' behavior. Some of the brands lose their customers' loyalty during and post-pandemic. This study poses questions of that during a period of extreme economic hardship and the changing landscape of consumer preferences and priorities, how consumer perceived their brand loyalty? Does customer still loyal to certain brand? Considering more people engaged in online shopping and changing spending pattern, is there any significant changes in customer brand loyalty? Hence, it is important to understand the current phenomena and what influence them.

The aims of this study are as follow:

- (a) To identify the extent of brand loyalty with FMCG among consumers in Selangor, Malaysia.
- (b) To analyse the influence of marketing positioning (product quality, value proposition, special features, and price perception) on brand loyalty with FMCG among consumers in Selangor, Malaysia.
- (c) To investigate whether price perception mediates the relationship between product price and brand loyalty.

Understanding the relationship between marketing positioning and brand loyalty is vital for businesses operating in the FMCG sector due to its highly competitive nature and the ever-evolving preferences of consumers. By understanding which positioning strategies resonate most effectively with local consumers, companies can optimise their marketing efforts, differentiate their brands, and gain a competitive edge in the market. The evidence of this study also could help FMCG manufacturers and retailers to develop more targeted and engaging marketing campaigns. By aligning positioning messages with consumer preferences and values, a brand can foster stronger emotional connections with customers, leading to increased loyalty and repeat purchases

Literature Review

A consumer's frequent repurchase of a favourite brand is referred to as brand loyalty (Venkatasalam & Karunakaran, 2021). According to Ali and Müller (2023), brand loyalty is an indicator on how likely a customer is to transfer from one brand to another, especially if that brand changes its pricing or product characteristics. Brand loyalty has several advantages. Primarily, it is obvious that retaining customers is far less expensive than attracting new ones, and current customers are a significant entrance barrier for rivals, in part because convincing consumers to switch allegiance is frequently prohibitively expensive (Sampaothong, 2018). There is also the benefit of trade leverage, which guarantees preferential shelf space for a preferred brand, as well as gives a company more time to react to rival movements (Venkatasalam & Karunakaran, 2021). FMCG marketers must have a thorough awareness of consumers' wants and preferences in order to successfully market their products because its significantly affects consumption and brand loyalty of the consumer. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework that suggest consumer brand loyalty could be influenced by marketing positioning.

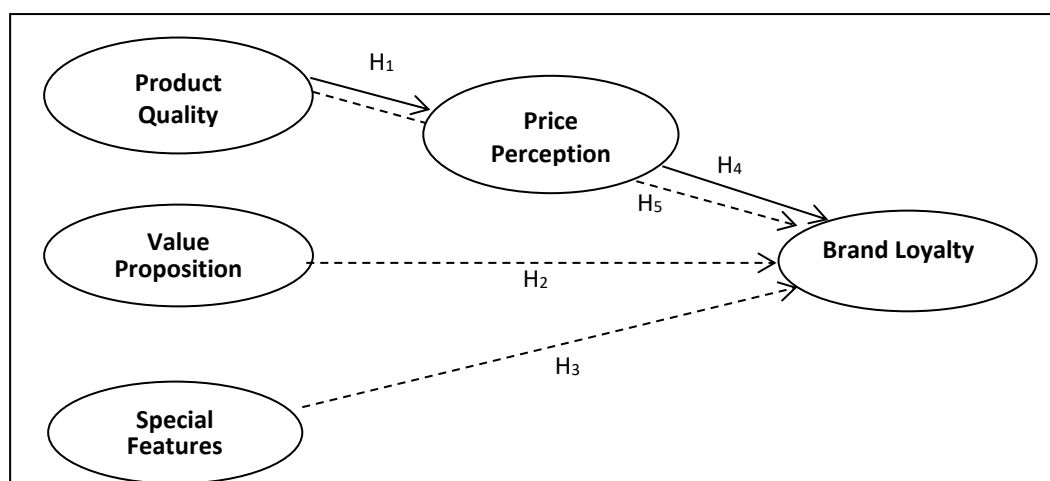


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Product Quality

Product quality is characteristic in products/services that always depends on their ability to satisfy stated or implied customer needs (Amalia & Budiono, 2022). Previous studies found a significant relationship between product quality and customer brand loyalty in the FMCG (Fasiha et al., 2022; Gereaa et al., 2021; Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021). According to

Ikramuddin and Mariyudi (2021), consumers expect products to meet certain standards of quality, including freshness, taste, reliability, and safety. When products consistently meet or exceed these expectations, it enhances customer satisfaction and fosters brand loyalty. Keller (2021) argued that consistent delivery of high-quality products builds trust and credibility for FMCG brands. Positive experiences with quality products contribute to positive brand perceptions and strengthen the bond between consumers and brands (Keller, 2021). In competitive FMCG markets where products may appear similar, product quality can serve as a crucial differentiator. Brands that consistently deliver superior quality products stand out and command greater customer loyalty (Fasiha et al., 2022). This indirectly indicates that quality of the products has the potential to evoke positive emotions and create a sense of attachment and loyalty among consumers. Brands that evoke emotional connections through their products are more likely to enjoy enduring loyalty from customers (Gerea et al., 2021). Therefore, this study predicts the following hypothesis.

H₁: Product quality has a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty.

Value Proposition

Value proposition is defined as a strategic tool facilitating communication to customers and offer a superior value package to targeted customers (Leroi-Werelds et al., 2021). A unique value proposition sets a brand apart from its competitors in the market. When consumers perceive a brand's offerings as distinctive and superior in fulfilling their needs, they are more inclined to develop loyalty to that brand over others (Xu et al., 2024). Similarly, Bernarto et al. (2020) found that when consumers have positive experiences with products that align with the brand's value proposition, they are more likely to trust the brand and remain loyal to it. Zulfikar (2022) also revealed that a value proposition that resonates with consumers on an emotional level can deepen the bond between the brand and its customers. This indicates that brands that evoke positive emotions through their value proposition are more likely to cultivate long-term loyalty and advocacy (Zulfikar, 2022). Gerea et al. (2021) suggested that brands that consistently deliver on their value proposition across various touch points and over time reinforce their brand promise. This consistency enhances consumer trust and loyalty by demonstrating reliability and commitment to meeting customer expectations. Based on this discussion, this study conjectures the following hypothesis.

H₂: Value proposition has a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty.

Special Features

Special features refer to unique characteristics or functionalities that differentiate a product from competitors and provide additional value to consumers (Nughoro, 2024). Special features distinguish a brand's products from competitors in the market. It serves as a point of differentiation, allowing brands to stand out and attract loyal customers who appreciate the added value provided by these features (Zulfikar, 2022). When consumers perceive these features as valuable and desirable, they are more likely to develop preferences for the brand's products over others, leading to increased brand loyalty (Kegenbekov et al., 2021). Special features often enhance the utility and convenience of FMCG products, making them more appealing to consumers. For example, features such as resealable packaging, easy-to-use designs, or added functionalities improve the user experience and contribute to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty (Ali & Muhammad, 2021). It also can increase the perceived value of products in the eyes of consumers. When consumers perceive that the benefits provided by special features outweigh the costs, they are more likely to perceive the product as offering

good value for money and exhibit loyalty to the brand (Oliver, 2021). This discussion led to the proposes of the following hypothesis.

H₃: Special features has a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty.

Price Perception

Price perception is a consumer's assessment of the comparison with what has been paid and what will be obtained from products (Amalia & Budiono, 2022). Price plays a significant role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions, especially in FMCG markets where products are frequently purchased and compared based on price. Brands that offer competitive pricing or discounts can attract price-sensitive consumers and build loyalty through perceived affordability (Kumar & Sathish, 2021). In addition, high-quality products are often associated with greater value for money. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for products they perceive as superior in quality, especially if they believe that the benefits outweigh the cost (Lina, 2022). Besides, premium pricing can contribute to building a brand's image of exclusivity, luxury, or prestige. Consumers may develop a sense of pride or status associated with purchasing higher-priced FMCG products, leading to increased brand loyalty and advocacy (Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021). In addition, Amalia and Budiono (2022) found that product quality has a significant effect on customer brand loyalty through price perception. This discussion has led to the assumption of the following hypotheses.

H₄: Price perception has a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty.

H₅: Price perception mediates the relationship between product quality on consumer brand loyalty.

Methodology

Quantitative technique with a cross-sectional research design is adopted for this study (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). This study is conducted mainly in Selangor, Malaysia. According to the Malaysian Population Statistics by States issued by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), Selangor is the state with the highest total population compared to other states in Malaysia with almost 7.0 million people. In addition, Selangor population generated roughly 30 percent of the nation's gross national income (GNI), or RM263 billion. Due to high population and great purchasing power, Selangor state was chosen as the sampling location for this study. Specifically, consumers in Selangor are regarded as the study's sample frame. There are 102 consumers participated in this study.

Survey Instruments

Pre-validated scales with appropriate modifications were used to align with the context of Malaysian consumer concept. There are six parts in the survey questionnaire for this research. In addition to demographic data, the questionnaire measured the constructs of product quality, value proposition, special features, price perception, and brand loyalty as listed in Table 1. Using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), the respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with their descriptions of the measurement items.

Table 1
Measurement of the Constructs and Its Sources

Constructs	Items	Source(s)
Product Quality	7	Atulkar (2020)
Value Proposition	7	Atulkar (2020)
Special Features	7	Lee & Kang (2022)
Price Perception	7	Yasri et al. (2020)
Brand Loyalty	7	Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2022)

Data Analysis

A mediation testing is used to investigate whether price perception mediate the influence of product quality towards consumer brand loyalty in Selangor. The SPSS Process Macro Model 4 add-on function in SPSS is used to test the direct and indirect effects among all the constructs in a model whether it is single or multiple mediator or moderator model (Hayes & Rockwood, 2016). Mediation in statistics is a hypothesised model in which the first variable influences a second variable then the second variable influences a third variable. M is a mediating variable (also called mediator) that mediates the relationship between a predictor variable, X, and an outcome variable, Y as below simple mediation model (Figure 2). Based on Figure 2, X leads to M through path a, and M leads to Y through path b. Therefore, both path a and b have a direct effect. In the mediational effect, X leads to Y through M demonstrating indirect effect.

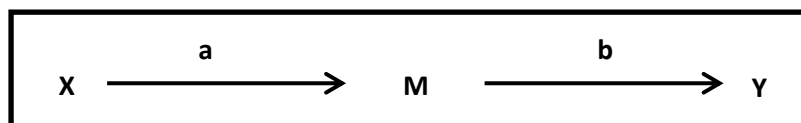


Figure 2. Simple Mediation Model

This current study proposes a research framework where the mediating construct, price perception (M) mediates the relationship of predictor construct, which are product quality (X1) on the outcome construct, consumer brand loyalty (Y). The ‘Model 4’ in the model templates for SPSS and SAS Process is chosen for the current study to get the results shown in Figure 3.

Model 4: Statistical Diagram

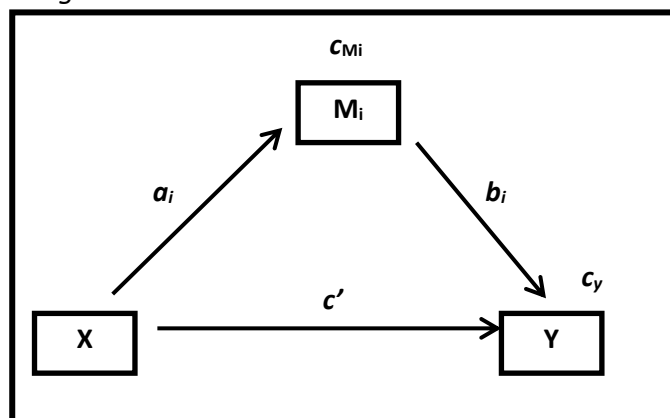


Figure 3. Model Template for SPSS and SAS Process (Model 4)

Preliminary Assessment

A preliminary assessment of the data was conducted by calculating the values of the Cronbach's alpha for each construct separately. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2019), reliability coefficient test indicates how well the items in a set positively correlated from one another. Constructs can be considered as reliable if the Cronbach's alpha value is set to be 0.7 and above (Pallant, 2020). Table 2 depicts that all constructs measuring consumer brand loyalty are ranging from values 0.877 to 0.741. Hence, the internal consistencies of all constructs are considered acceptable since each reliability testing exceeds the suggested threshold.

Table 2

Reliability and Normality Assessment Results

Constructs	Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
Product Quality	7	0.877	-0.018	0.015
Value Proposition	7	0.848	0.271	0.054
Special Features	7	0.741	1.630	1.954
Product Pricing	7	0.742	-0.732	0.041
Brand Loyalty	7	0.753	0.168	-0.073

Further, the assessment of normality of the metric constructs involves empirical measures of a distribution's shape characteristics (skewness and kurtosis). Table 2 shows that the normality assessment values for all constructs are between ± 2.00 as suggested by Pallant (2020). Therefore, this assessment confirms that the data of this study is normally distributed.

Results and Discussion

The demographic profile shows that 67.7% of research participants were male as compared to 32.3% of female. Furthermore, majority of the respondents are in the age group of 21 to 30 years old (59.8%). According to the respondents' educational background, the majority of them (36.3%) holds Bachelor Degree or Master Degree, followed by Diploma (26.5%). The occupational status of the respondents shows that 59.8% of them worked in public organisations or government agencies with monthly income of between RM2,500 to RM3,500 (45.1%).

The Extent of Consumer Brand Loyalty

This section presents the findings pertaining to the extent of consumer brand loyalty with FMCG products. To find out whether the overall mean of the extent of brand loyalty is significantly different from or equal to a given constant, one sample t-test was used. The mean score of 4.4764 for brand loyalty in Table 3 is statistically significant at the 1% level and suggests that the level of brand loyalty among consumers of FMCG products in Selangor are at high level. Perhaps, consumers in Selangor are satisfied buyers who do not want to risk a product change and will recommend the FMCG product to others.

Table 3

The Extent of Consumer Brand Loyalty

	n	Mean	One Sample T-Test	
			t-statistic	p value
Brand Loyalty	102	4.4764	56.870	.000^{***}

Note: Result is significantly different at ^{***} 1% level and ^{**} 5% level, respectively, using two-tailed tests.

In general, majority of respondents said their experience with the brand has been very good (mean = 4.820). This indicates that brand experience should meet and exceed the expectations of consumers in order to satisfy their needs. Further, the respondents also revealed that they are always loyal towards the brand when they get the required values (mean = 4.790). In addition, they are also always loyal towards the brand which creates emotional attachment (mean = 4.604). This signifies that bonding between consumer and brand grows the attachment and powerful emotional attachments. Therefore, there is a need to pay more attention on the marketing strategies with the focus more on consumer's emotional attachment.

Factors Influencing Consumer Brand Loyalty

Table 4 reveals that the regression model ($F(4, 102) = 11.880$, $p \text{ value} < .05^{***}$) is significant at 1% level, and the variation of the overall model is relatively moderate with R^2 value of 59.8% variation in the extent of brand loyalty. This finding indicates that 59.8% of the total variation in the extent of brand loyalty can be accounted for by four factors collectively in this model. The remaining 40.2% perhaps may be due to other factors that cannot be explained by this model.

Except for H_3 , the proposed research model was largely supported. Among the four constructs influencing consumer brand loyalty, price perception stands out strongly and significantly influence brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < .05^{***}$) among consumers in Selangor compared to product quality ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < .05^{***}$) and value proposition ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < .05^{**}$). The findings indicates that consumer regularly purchase reasonable price with high quality particular brands, as the quality perception is considered as an important determinant of emotional attachment which drives consumers to take purchase, repurchase or switch the brand decisions. Further, the values perceived from brand is also important during purchasing and decision-making process.

Table 4

Factors Influencing Consumer Brand Loyalty

Hypotheses	β	t-statistic	Results
H_1 : Product Quality \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.249	2.417 ^{***}	Supported
H_2 : Value Proposition \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.199	1.653 ^{**}	Supported
H_3 : Special Features \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.092	0.822 ^{NS}	Not Supported
H_4 : Price Perception \rightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.405	3.176 ^{***}	Supported

Note: ^{***} denotes significance at .001 level; ^{**} denotes significance at .05 level; ^{NS} denotes not significant.

However, the finding indicates that special features did not have significant impacts on consumer brand loyalty. Even though a specific feature makes the brand distinguishable from the commonly available products in the same category, perhaps price perception and product quality outweigh the importance of special features since the FMCG can be considered as consumers' daily consumption (Trope & Liberman 2020). This indicates that when experience and value of using a FMCG are increase, then it become easier to focus of specific brand rather than special features.

Mediating Role of Price Perception on the Consumer Brand Loyalty

This section discusses the results of mediating testing in order to examine whether price perception is a possible mediator to the relationship between product quality and brand loyalty among consumers in Selangor. Since this study consists of only independent construct (product quality), therefore the model testing was only Model Testing 1.

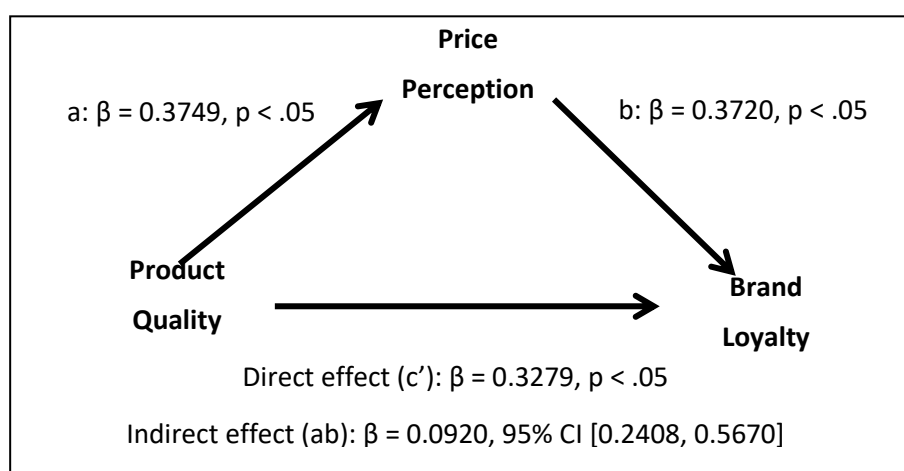


Figure 4. Model Testing 1 (IV is Product Quality, MV is Price Perception)

Hypothesis H₅ conjectures that price perception is a potential mediator on the relationship between product quality towards consumer brand loyalty. Figure 4 depicts the outcome of Model Testing 1 whereby the R² value of 0.3657 means that both product quality and price perception explain about 36.57% of the variance in the consumer brand loyalty. The mediation testing result reveals that product quality has a positive effect on price perception ($\beta = 0.3749, p < .05^{***}$). Next, price perception does significantly predict consumer brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.3720, p < .05^{***}$). Further, the result shows that the direct effect of product quality significantly influence consumer brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.3279, p < .05^{***}$). Finally, the β -value of indirect effect of product quality on consumer brand loyalty via price perception is 0.0920 ($p < .05^{***}$) and the 95% confidence interval (CI) falls between 0.2408 and 0.5670. Since the 95% CI does not include 0, the indirect effect is statistically significant (i.e., mediation is supported). This result indicates that there is a mediation role of the price perception on the relationship between product quality and consumer brand loyalty, hence H₅ is supported. This indicates that simultaneously, product quality and price perception positively and significantly influenced purchase, repurchase or switch the brand decisions.

Conclusion

Brand loyalty is critical for companies to consider in maintaining and developing their business especially in the FMCG market that faces high competition. This study reveals that as the

consumer feels the value benefits of FMCG product in the form of product quality, price savings, and value proportion, it may enhance the value of the brand and tend to loyal towards the brand. The results supported the previous study findings by demonstrating positive relationships (Bernarto et al., 2020; Fasiha et al., 2022; Gereaa et al., 2021; Ikramuddin & Mariyudi, 2021; Xu et al., 2024) and also supported by mediating analysis that product quality has a significant effect on customer brand loyalty through price perception (Amalia & Budiono, 2022). Thus, the customers in the FMCG market prefers to purchase high-quality FMCG products in discounted rates or reasonable price which enhance perceived value and direct them to present brand loyalty. Hence, FMCG manufacturers, distributors, or retailers are expected to set reasonable prices for various levels of society and should frequently offer discounts, schemes, and offers on FMCG products, motivate customers to receive value benefits from shopping process and generate loyalty.

This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge on the understanding of the important role of marketing positioning in influencing brand loyalty of FMCG products. It informs FMCG manufacturers of the importance of presenting good quality with value proportion, building a strong brand image, and carefully managing pricing policies to encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions. This research's theoretical contribution is to strengthen previous studies stating that perceived quality, price perception, and value proposition are the main constructs affecting consumer brand loyalty.

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