

# Loyalty Determinants within the Ride-Hailing Ecosystem: User Satisfaction as an Intermediary Between Brand Identity and Service Excellence in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** This study examines the effects of brand image and service quality on customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction acting as a mediating variable among Gojek application users in Magelang, Indonesia. Understanding the determinants of customer loyalty is essential for sustaining user engagement in the increasingly competitive app-based transportation industry. Data were collected from 114 respondents via an online questionnaire using purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.2.9 software. The findings reveal that brand image has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction, whereas service quality does not. Moreover, neither brand image nor service quality directly affects customer loyalty. In contrast, customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. Mediation analysis indicates that customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty, but does not mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening brand image perceptions and enhancing overall user satisfaction to promote long-term customer loyalty in app-based transportation services

## 1 Introduction

Technological advancements in the digital era have stimulated the proliferation of application-based services accessible through mobile devices. Among the sectors experiencing substantial transformation is land transportation, particularly with the advent of digitally mediated ride-hailing platforms. Such services offer the general public a convenient, efficient, and time-effective mode of transportation, thereby driving adoption across diverse societal segments. Furthermore, the increasing penetration of internet connectivity and mobile device usage has empowered consumers to access a broad spectrum of services, including mobility, food delivery, and various other offerings, through geolocation-enabled applications integrated with cashless payment infrastructures [1]. The development of these application-based transportation services also contributes to more efficient, accessible, and

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sustainable urban mobility by integrating digital technology into modern transportation systems.

The escalating consumer expectation for service excellence has compelled organizations to recalibrate their strategic frameworks in order to maintain user contentment and cultivate enduring customer retention. User loyalty serves as a pivotal catalyst in driving repurchase intentions, continued service engagement, and positive word-of-mouth advocacy, thereby cementing stable, enduring relationships between service providers and their clientele [2]. High levels of satisfaction often diminish price sensitivity, as consumers prioritize perceived value and a superior overall experience over lower costs [3]. Consequently, providers within the app-based transportation landscape must rigorously monitor the determinants of satisfaction to preserve their competitive advantage in a volatile market.

Scholarly discourse in the transit sector consistently identifies brand identity, service excellence, along with customer satisfaction as the fundamental pillars underpinning consumer commitment. Empirical investigations reveal that a complementary interplay between operational performance and brand perception strengthens user contentment, which subsequently translates into heightened consumer loyalty [4]. Nevertheless, the existing literature reveals significant empirical discrepancies. For instance, research on Canadian public transit systems demonstrated that the pathways through which service quality influences behavioral intentions vary significantly between captive and choice riders [5]. Furthermore, a multi-city analysis across Europe indicated a full mediation model, wherein service quality impacted loyalty only indirectly through the lens of customer satisfaction [6].

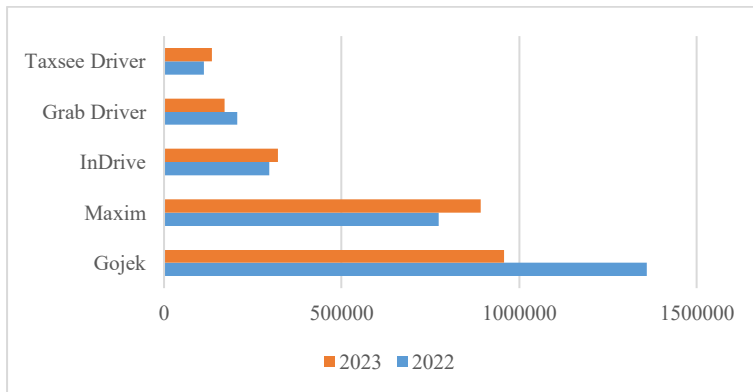
Such inconsistent findings underscore a theoretical lacuna regarding the stability of inter-variable relationships within transportation services, particularly within the Indonesian app-based transportation ecosystem, where distinct regional characteristics may significantly influence user behavior. The proliferation of digitally-driven platforms such as Gojek has profoundly reshaped the manner in which consumers evaluate service attributes, brand prestige, and overall service excellence. Prior literature has yielded conflicting results concerning the intermediary function of user contentment within the nexus of brand perception, operational excellence, and consumer commitment. High-performance service dimensions, including responsiveness, user-friendliness, security, and punctuality, are essential for crafting positive user experiences that culminate in heightened satisfaction and solidified loyalty [7]. Given these empirical discrepancies, the present study is designed to scrutinize the extent to which brand perception and operational excellence drive consumer commitment, channeled through user contentment as an intermediary construct, within the Gojek user community in Magelang, Indonesia.

On-demand transportation is defined as a digitalized, application-centric service that enables consumers to solicit transit via mobile devices. The intensifying rivalry among platform providers in this sector necessitates continuous refinement of brand equity and service excellence to mitigate customer churn and sustain long-term loyalty. Within the Indonesian market, the landscape is characterized by prominent players such as Gojek, Grab, and Maxim. Gojek, in particular, has evolved into a comprehensive 'super-app' ecosystem that integrates mobility, logistics (GoFood and GoMart), and digital payment solutions (GoPay). Its multifaceted platform architecture has emerged as a significant contributor to the broadening of the digital economic landscape, fostering the participation and empowerment of diverse stakeholders, most notably Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Empirical evidence reflects the robust expansion of this sector; according to data from GoodStats.id, downloads of the Gojek application surged from 957,000 in 2022 to approximately 1.36 million in 2023. This significant upward trend underscores the escalating adoption of the platform, signaling that Gojek has become an indispensable component of community mobility in the contemporary digital era. Such growth not only validates the

platform's market dominance but also highlights the increasing reliance of the population on app-based solutions, further justifying the necessity of analyzing the factors that sustain user commitment within this expanding user base.

Given this substantial and sustained growth in user adoption, understanding the underlying determinants that foster and maintain user loyalty becomes increasingly critical. In this regard, brand image and service quality emerge as two of the most consequential factors influencing the overall user experience and long-term commitment to a platform.



**Fig. 1.** Total downloads of online motorcycle taxi applications (Source: GoodStats.id)

Grounded in this context, the present investigation constructs an integrative analytical framework to empirically assess the extent to which brand image and service quality shape customer loyalty, positioning customer satisfaction as an intermediary mechanism within the Gojek user population, as conceptually depicted in **Fig. 1**. Trust in a brand, cultivated through a well-established brand identity, alongside the experiential perceptions derived from superior service delivery, collectively constitute the foundational antecedents of consumer satisfaction. From a theoretical standpoint, this research aspires to enrich the scholarly discourse within the domain of service marketing, while from a practical perspective, it furnishes strategic recommendations for organizations committed to elevating consumer satisfaction and reinforcing long-term loyalty.

## 2 Method

The present investigation applies a quantitative explanatory research design to scrutinize the causal interdependencies among brand perception, operational excellence, and consumer commitment, wherein user contentment operates as an intermediary construct. A numerically-driven approach was deemed appropriate given that the inquiry is grounded in measurable data subjected to statistical procedures, enabling empirical validation of the proposed hypothetical relationships [8]. The focal object of this investigation is the Gojek digital transportation platform, with the research population comprising active Gojek application users domiciled in Magelang City, Indonesia. The rationale for selecting this population stems from the substantial reliance on app-based mobility solutions in everyday routines, compounded by the intensifying competitive dynamics among digital transportation operators in the region.

Respondents were recruited through a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, whereby participants were selected in accordance with predetermined eligibility criteria pertinent to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria encompassed: (1) prior utilization of Gojek services on no fewer than two occasions, (2) current residency within Magelang

City, and (3) attainment of a minimum age of 17 years or possession of at least a senior secondary educational qualification. The determination of an adequate sample size was derived by multiplying the total number of research indicators by a factor ranging from 5 to 10 respondents per indicator. Accordingly, given that the instrument comprised 19 indicators, a minimum threshold of 114 respondents was established as statistically sufficient for this inquiry [8].

Empirical data were sourced exclusively from respondents through a digitally-administered structured questionnaire deployed via Google Forms. For the purpose of statistical examination, PLS-SEM was utilized as the primary analytical tool, given its robustness in handling multifaceted interdependencies among latent variables while remaining well-suited for datasets of moderate scale [9]. The examination was conducted in a systematic, multi-phase sequence: the initial phase involved appraisal of the outer model to verify construct validity and internal consistency, the subsequent phase encompassed evaluation of the inner structural configuration, and the concluding phase entailed empirical testing of hypothesized associations to delineate both direct and indirect relational pathways across the identified research constructs.

### **3 Results and discussion**

This section presents the research findings and discusses and interprets the results by relating them to the research objectives and relevant literature.

#### **3.1 Respondent characteristics**

Examination of the sample profile indicates that female respondents constituted the dominant gender category, representing 64% of the aggregate participant pool, whereas male respondents comprised the residual 36%, corresponding to 41 individuals. Pertaining to age stratification, a substantial proportion of participants were concentrated within the 21-to-25-year cohort, encompassing 98 individuals or 86% of the cumulative sample, thereby affirming that the preponderance of the study population belongs to the young adult demographic.

Concerning educational attainment, the largest segment of respondents had completed senior secondary schooling or an equivalent qualification, encompassing 71 individuals or 62.3% of the sample. With regard to occupational status, undergraduate students emerged as the dominant group, comprising 78 respondents or 68.9% of the total, suggesting that the sample is primarily constituted of individuals who are concurrently engaged in academic pursuits.

#### **3.2 Outer model analysis**

##### **3.2.1 Convergent validity test**

All measurable items yielded outer loading values exceeding the 0.70 threshold, affirming that the operational indicators designated for Brand Perception, Operational Excellence, User Contentment, and Consumer Commitment satisfy the prerequisites for convergent validity. These outcomes substantiate that each observable item sufficiently captures its corresponding latent dimension, rendering the instrumentation appropriate for deployment as a measurement apparatus within the present inquiry.

### **3.2.2 Assessment of discriminant validity**

Examination of cross-loading values reveals that each observable item yields a considerably superior loading coefficient on its designated latent construct relative to all remaining constructs, signifying a robust degree of indicator exclusivity. Such evidence corroborates that the measurement items are appropriately anchored to their intended theoretical dimensions while exhibiting negligible conceptual overlap with alternative constructs embedded within the framework.

Supplementary evidence for discriminant validity was derived through comparison of the AVE square root values against inter-construct correlations, wherein each construct's AVE square root consistently exceeded its corresponding correlation coefficients, in conformity with the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The aggregated evidence corroborates that each latent dimension constitutes a conceptually independent entity, mitigating potential multicollinearity concerns and verifying that all constructs adhere to the prescribed discriminant validity standards.

### **3.2.3 Reliability test**

Convergent validity assessment demonstrates that the AVE coefficients for Brand Image, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Loyalty uniformly exceed the 0.50 threshold, confirming that each construct successfully captures a dominant share of variance from its associated indicators. This evidence establishes that the measurement instrumentation achieves an adequate level of convergent validity, wherein observable items are sufficiently representative of their designated underlying dimensions.

Reliability assessment reveals that Composite Reliability indices for all constructs surpass the 0.70 benchmark, while Cronbach's Alpha values correspondingly exceed the 0.60 minimum criterion. The convergence of these indices establishes a robust degree of internal consistency, validating that all constructs are measured with sufficient precision and are eligible for inclusion in subsequent structural analysis.

## **3.3 Structural path analysis**

### **3.3.1 Model fit assessment**

Model fit assessment reveals an SRMR value of 0.094, falling below the 0.10 threshold and thereby confirming acceptable model fit. The GoF Index of 0.466 further substantiates the overall structural model adequacy, classifying the model fit within the large category.

### **3.3.2 Coefficient of determination analysis**

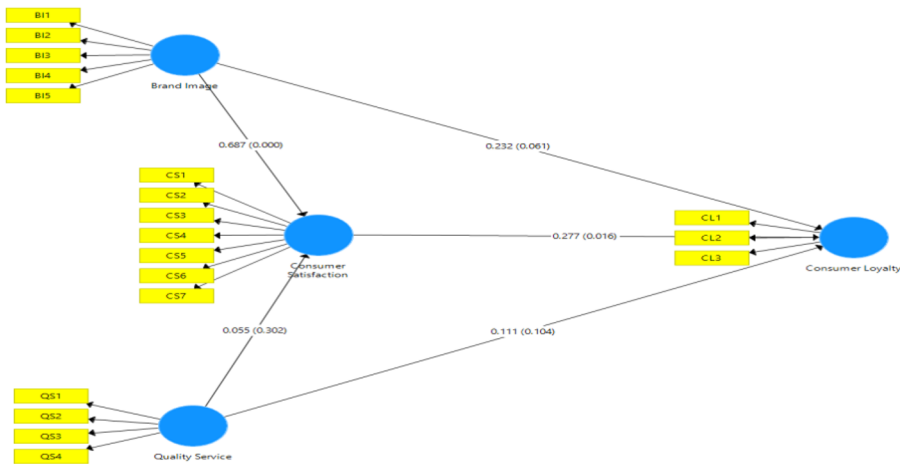
The corrected coefficient of determination for Customer Loyalty registers at 0.223, denoting that Brand Image and Service Quality jointly account for 22.3% of the variability observed in Customer Loyalty. The residual 77.7% of unexplained variance is presumably attributable to additional predictor constructs not incorporated within the boundaries of the present analytical framework.

Correspondingly, the corrected coefficient of determination for Customer Satisfaction yields a value of 0.473, indicating that Brand Image and Service Quality collectively account for 47.3% of the variability observed in Customer Satisfaction. The remaining 52.7% of unexplained variance is presumably ascribed to additional exogenous constructs outside the

scope of the present model, suggesting potential avenues for model enrichment in prospective investigations.

### 3.3.3 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis examination in this inquiry was executed through two analytical approaches: direct effect estimation, which scrutinizes the direct associative pathways from predictor constructs (X) toward outcome variables (Y), and indirect effect estimation, which appraises the intermediary function of User Contentment (Z) in augmenting the nexus between X and Y in alignment with the proposed conceptual framework. The criteria for hypothetical acceptance are predicated upon a t-statistic exceeding 1.96 accompanied by a p-value below 0.05. The comprehensive research model is visually represented in **Fig. 2**.



**Fig. 2.** Full model

The results of the analysis using this model are presented in **Table 1**, which reports the original sample (O), t-statistic, and p-value values as follows:

**Table 1.** Hypothesis testing results

No	Path	Original Sample (O)	t-statistic	p-value
1	BI → CS	0.687	10.932	0.000
2	SQ → CS	0.055	-0.518	0.302
3	BI → CL	0.222	1.549	0.061
4	SQ → CL	0.111	1.259	0.104
5	CS → CL	0.277	2.161	0.016
6	BI → CS → CL	0.190	2.041	0.021
7	SQ → CS → CL	0.015	0.455	0.324

Note: BI = Brand Image, SQ = Service Quality, CS = Customer Satisfaction, CL = Customer Loyalty

**Table 1** presents the direct and indirect associative pathways among research constructs, evaluated through original sample coefficients, t-statistic, and p-value, with acceptance criteria set at t-statistic surpassing the 1.96 critical value with significance threshold below 0.05.

- a. **H1:** Brand Image demonstrates a statistically significant and favorable impact upon Customer Satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.687$ ;  $t = 10.932$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, H1 is accepted.

- b. **H2:** Service Quality fails to demonstrate a statistically significant impact upon Customer Satisfaction, as reflected by a t-value of 0.518 below the 1.96 critical threshold and a significance level of 0.302, surpassing the 0.05 benchmark. Hence, H2 is not accepted.
- c. **H3:** Brand Image does not yield a statistically significant impact upon Customer Loyalty, as reflected by a t-value of 1.549, below the 1.96 critical threshold, and a significance level of 0.061, surpassing the 0.05 benchmark. Thus, H3 is not accepted.
- d. **H4:** Service Quality fails to exert a statistically significant impact upon Customer Loyalty, as indicated by a t-value of 1.259, below the 1.96 critical threshold, and a significance level of 0.104, surpassing the 0.05 benchmark. Accordingly, H4 is not accepted.
- e. **H5:** Customer Satisfaction exerts a favorable and statistically significant impact upon Customer Loyalty, evidenced by a coefficient of 0.277, a t-value of 2.161, surpassing the 1.96 critical threshold, and a significance level of 0.016, below the 0.05 benchmark. Therefore, H5 is accepted.
- f. **H6:** Brand Image exerts a statistically significant indirect impact upon Customer Loyalty, with Customer Satisfaction serving as the intermediary construct, as reflected by a t-value of 2.041 surpassing the 1.96 threshold and a significance level of 0.021 below 0.05. Hence, H6 is accepted.
- g. **H7:** Service Quality fails to demonstrate a statistically significant indirect impact upon Customer Loyalty, with Customer Satisfaction not serving as an effective intermediary construct, as reflected by a t-value of 0.455 below the 1.96 threshold and a significance level of 0.324 surpassing 0.05. Thus, H7 is not accepted

### **3.4 Discussion**

This discussion section interprets the research findings based on the empirical results obtained from testing the research model. Each relationship between variables is examined by linking the findings to previous studies in order to identify similarities or differences.

#### **3.4.1 Brand image in shaping customer satisfaction**

The analysis indicates that brand image has a positive, significant effect on customer satisfaction. This finding suggests that Gojek's positive brand image such as a strong reputation, high level of trust, and strong brand value can enhance customer satisfaction among users in Magelang. When customers have positive perceptions of a brand, they tend to develop higher expectations regarding the services provided. Consequently, when the service experience meets or exceeds these expectations, customer satisfaction increases. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that a strong brand image can enhance customer satisfaction because the brand reflects perceptions of service quality and reliability [10].

#### **3.4.2 Service quality in shaping customer satisfaction**

The hypothesis testing results indicate that service quality does not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. This condition may be attributed to the high expectations customers have toward Gojek's services. Customers tend to emphasize aspects such as service speed, driver availability, competitive pricing, and the ease of use of the application, which they perceive as having a greater influence on their satisfaction than overall service quality. These findings are consistent with several previous studies suggesting that service quality is not always the primary determinant of customer satisfaction in app-based services. Therefore,

Gojek needs to strengthen the service dimensions most relevant to customer needs and expectations to foster more positive attitudes and enhance customer satisfaction [11].

#### *3.4.3 Brand image in shaping customer loyalty*

The findings indicate that brand image does not always have a significant direct effect on customer loyalty, particularly when brand perceptions are not supported by other factors such as customer trust and satisfaction. A positive brand image alone is insufficient to foster loyalty without strong customer experiences and service interactions. Therefore, strengthening the customer experience and service interaction dimensions is essential to ensuring that brand image can effectively build sustainable customer loyalty. These findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the mediating role of trust and satisfaction in the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty [12]. Furthermore, strategies to enhance brand image should be combined with improvements in service quality and customer experience to achieve optimal outcomes [10].

#### *3.4.4 Service quality in shaping customer loyalty*

The results indicate that service quality does not have a significant direct effect on customer loyalty; rather, its influence operates indirectly through customer satisfaction and trust. Studies in the banking and digital service sectors emphasize that service quality improves customer satisfaction, which, in turn, drives customer loyalty. In other words, service quality serves as a fundamental basis for building positive customer attitudes that contribute to long-term loyalty. Therefore, strategies aimed at enhancing loyalty should combine improvements in service quality with efforts to strengthen customer satisfaction and trust, thereby creating sustainable emotional relationships. These findings are consistent across various service contexts, including banking and e-banking, and highlight the importance of a holistic approach to customer experience management [3]. This approach is also relevant for platforms such as Gojek, which need to integrate service quality with strategies that foster positive customer attitudes in order to enhance customer loyalty.

#### *3.4.5 Customer satisfaction in shaping customer loyalty*

The test results indicate that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty, meaning that higher levels of customer satisfaction increase the likelihood that customers will continue using the service. Customer satisfaction creates positive experiences, strengthens trust, and reinforces intentions for repeat usage as well as emotional and cognitive brand loyalty. Previous studies also highlight the crucial role of satisfaction in building customer loyalty across various sectors. Therefore, strategies aimed at enhancing loyalty should focus on improving satisfaction by maintaining consistent service quality and delivering satisfying customer experiences. These findings emphasize that without strong customer satisfaction, other factors, such as service quality or brand image, may struggle to drive customer loyalty effectively [13].

#### *3.4.6 Customer satisfaction as an intermediary between brand image and customer loyalty*

Statistical evidence confirms that Customer Satisfaction significantly operates as an intermediary construct within the Brand Image, Customer Loyalty nexus, rendering the direct associative pathway between them statistically negligible. Brand Image exerts a pronounced

influence upon Customer Satisfaction, which subsequently consolidates Customer Loyalty, with the coefficient attenuation from 0.470 to 0.232 substantiating full mediation within this pathway. Such outcomes corroborate preceding empirical investigations underscoring the pivotal intermediary function of satisfaction across diverse service contexts. Superior user experiences and constructive brand interactions further reinforce this mediating mechanism, amplifying the cumulative effect on Customer Loyalty. Accordingly, marketing initiatives ought to prioritize Brand Image enhancement through deliberate cultivation of Customer Satisfaction as a foundation for enduring Customer Loyalty [14].

### **3.4.7 Customer satisfaction as an intermediary between service quality and customer loyalty**

Service Quality fails to exert a significant impact upon Customer Satisfaction ( $p$ -value = 0.302) and Customer Loyalty, rendering Customer Satisfaction ineffective as an intermediary within this pathway. This implies that Service Quality alone is insufficient to cultivate loyalty unless accompanied by meaningful user contentment. Gojek is therefore encouraged to reinforce application usability, operational swiftness, and responsiveness to consumer grievances to effectively elevate Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty [15]. Gojek is therefore encouraged to reinforce application usability, operational swiftness, and responsiveness to consumer grievances to effectively elevate Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

## **4 Conclusion**

The present study investigates the extent to which Brand Image and Service Quality shape Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty within the Gojek user population in Magelang. Statistical examination reveals that Brand Image yields a favorable and significant impact upon Customer Satisfaction, whilst Service Quality fails to produce a comparable effect. With regard to direct pathways, neither Brand Image nor Service Quality registers a statistically significant contribution toward Customer Loyalty, whereas Customer Satisfaction emerges as a pivotal and significant antecedent of Customer Loyalty.

Customer Satisfaction was found to fully mediate the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty, yet no mediating effect was detected between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty. These outcomes underscore the pivotal role of Customer Satisfaction in bridging Brand Image and Customer Loyalty within app-based transportation services. Cultivating a strong Brand Image and delivering superior user experiences are instrumental in elevating Customer Satisfaction, which in turn consolidates Customer Loyalty, contributing to more efficient and sustainable urban transportation systems.

This investigation is subject to several constraints, notably the geographical confinement to Gojek users within Magelang City and the limited constructs incorporated into the analytical framework. Prospective studies are encouraged to extend the geographical scope to broader populations while integrating supplementary constructs pertaining to digital service user experience, encompassing application usability, service delivery speed, and operational responsiveness.

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