

Research.

Service Quality vs. Advertising in Building Customer Loyalty: Evidence from a Local Pharmacy in Indonesia

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Received: May 5, 2025 Accepted: June 21, 2025 Published: June 30, 2025

To cite this article: Susanto, H., & Gustiawan, W.D. (2025). Service Quality vs. Advertising in Building Customer Loyalty: Evidence from a Local Pharmacy in Indonesia. *The Management Journal of BINANIAGA* 10 (1) 41-54
doi: [10.33062/mjb.v10i01.90](https://doi.org/10.33062/mjb.v10i01.90)

Abstract. *Customer loyalty remains a pivotal concern in the pharmaceutical retail sector, particularly in developing regions where competition between independent pharmacies and large chains is intensifying. This study investigates the comparative influence of service quality and advertising on customer loyalty, using a local pharmacy in Trenggalek Regency, Indonesia, as a case study. A quantitative method was employed, involving a structured questionnaire completed by 138 respondents. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results revealed that service quality has a strong and positive influence on customer loyalty, while advertising surprisingly exhibits a significant negative effect. Together, the two variables explained 61.4% of the variance in loyalty, confirming their collective relevance. The findings suggest that while high-quality interpersonal service strengthens customer commitment, misaligned or poorly perceived advertising may undermine it. This study contributes to marketing literature by contextualizing SERVQUAL and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theories within a semi-urban healthcare setting, and highlights the need for service-driven branding strategies in trust-based markets.*

Key words: *service quality, advertising, customer loyalty, community pharmacy, service marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the competitive landscape of the pharmaceutical industry, particularly in pharmacy retail, customer loyalty has been recognized as a pivotal element for long-term sustainability and success. Effective strategies to foster customer loyalty hinge significantly on two primary constructs: service quality and advertising. Both factors are interrelated and contribute to shaping customer perceptions and behaviors in ways that are essential for remaining competitive against larger chain pharmacies and online competitors (Kevrekidis et al., 2018). Service quality in pharmacy contexts can be broken down into several dimensions, including empathy, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and tangibility, which collectively enhance the customer experience (Nikolova et al., 2017). Studies consistently reveal that higher service quality correlates with improved customer satisfaction, which in turn mediates customer loyalty (Hindi et al., 2018). Specifically, customer trust, significantly fostered through effective communication by pharmacy personnel, has been shown to be a critical driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nurlibna et al., 2024). Pharmacists who engage in active listening and convey empathy can build stronger relational bonds with customers, thereby cultivating their loyalty (Berhanu et al., 2022). The findings from multiple studies support the premise that high-quality interpersonal interactions contribute significantly to enhancing the overall pharmacy experience, further reinforcing customer commitment (Pribadi et al., 2021).

On the advertising front, it plays a crucial role in shaping customer awareness and influencing purchasing decisions. Effective advertising strategies can distinguish independent pharmacies in a saturated market, highlighting their unique offerings and services (Nikbin et al., 2021). Research has shown that advertising not only aids in creating brand presence but can also evoke positive customer emotions, which are critical for fostering loyalty (Jalees et al., 2023). For independent pharmacies, tailoring advertising efforts to resonate with local customers will enhance retention rates and establish a loyal customer base. Notably, during periods of economic downturn, trends suggest a shift in marketing focus from traditional methods to digital and social media platforms, catering to changing consumer preferences (Watson et al., 2020). Despite the evident significance of both service quality and advertising, there remains a notable gap in research examining their synergistic effects on customer loyalty specifically in pharmacy settings. This lack of focused studies, particularly concerning independent or semi-urban pharmacies, presents an opportunity for further investigation (Watson et al., 2019). Addressing this gap is vital for developing targeted marketing strategies that can effectively foster loyalty across diverse pharmacy formats, ensuring the sustained success of these businesses. Introduction should start with a very broad perspective of the main subject area, before gradually narrowing the focus down to the main problem being investigated.

Despite the growing body of literature on customer loyalty in service industries, limited empirical attention has been given to pharmacies operating in semi-urban or rural regions of developing countries. These pharmacies often face unique constraints in infrastructure, human capital, and marketing capacity (Tandiono & Agus, 2023). Furthermore, many studies assume a positive relationship between advertising and loyalty, without critically assessing the possibility of advertising backlash or dissonance—especially when promotional content does not align with service realities (Nikolova et al., 2017). In such contexts, promotional efforts may even erode trust if perceived as exaggerated or misrepresentative (Gregory & Austin, 2021). This phenomenon remains understudied and warrants further investigation, particularly in healthcare settings where credibility and service consistency are paramount (Guhl et al., 2018). This study addresses the aforementioned gap by focusing on Prigi Farma Pharmacy, a locally owned pharmacy situated in Trenggalek Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Operating within a semi-urban setting, this pharmacy represents a class of healthcare providers that are often overlooked in mainstream marketing research but are vital to local healthcare systems (Kaura et al., 2015). Understanding the dynamics of customer loyalty in such settings is critical not only for managerial improvement but also for informing policy support and capacity development in community-based healthcare delivery (Budianto et al., 2022). Moreover, this study examines the dual impact of service quality and advertising, exploring whether these variables operate synergistically or divergently in influencing loyalty (Adebisi & Lawal, 2017).

Research Question

The main objective of this research is to analyze the influence of service quality and advertising on customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical sector, with a specific focus on a local Indonesian pharmacy. More precisely, the study seeks to

- (1) determine the individual (partial) impact of service quality on customer loyalty;
- (2) assess the individual effect of advertising on customer loyalty; and
- (3) evaluate the joint (simultaneous) impact of both variables on loyalty

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation of Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a multidimensional construct that encompasses both behavioral and attitudinal components. From a behavioral perspective, loyalty is reflected in the frequency of repeat purchases and resistance to switching, while from an attitudinal

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perspective, it includes commitment, emotional attachment, and brand advocacy (Oliver, 1999). In service marketing literature, loyalty is often viewed as a critical outcome variable that captures the long-term success of customer relationship strategies (Oliver, 1999). proposed a loyalty development model in which cognitive, affective, and conative components interact to build a customer's commitment over time. In the context of pharmaceutical services, loyalty is particularly crucial due to the nature of the product—high involvement, low differentiation, and significant health implications—making trust, satisfaction, and service experience central to the loyalty formation process (Abdullah et al., 2022) . Service quality is widely acknowledged as a fundamental antecedent of customer loyalty, particularly in health-related services where intangible and experiential elements dominate the customer-provider interaction (Parasuraman et al., 1991a). The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman identifies five dimensions of service quality—reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles—as core elements that shape consumer perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1991b). In pharmacy settings, studies have demonstrated that the professional conduct of pharmacists, accuracy in dispensing medication, empathy in communication, and the cleanliness and accessibility of the physical environment significantly affect patients' satisfaction and retention (Abdullah et al., 2022). For example, Hariri and Ghazali (2021) demonstrated that pharmacies that emphasized interpersonal warmth and reliable consultation services tended to generate higher loyalty scores (Kitapçı et al., 2014). However, few studies have contextualized these findings in developing or semi-urban regions where constraints in training and infrastructure may alter the performance and perception of service quality (M. Kim et al., 2013)

The Evolving Role of Advertising in Health Services

Advertising, traditionally viewed as a tool for creating awareness and shaping attitudes, has undergone significant transformation in the health services sector. While advertising can inform and influence patients, it must also navigate ethical boundaries, particularly in pharmacy and medical contexts (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2018). Unlike in consumer goods, where emotional appeals and creative formats dominate, advertising in pharmacy services is expected to be informative, credible, and aligned with regulatory standards (Xie et al., 2023). Several studies highlight that advertising effectiveness in healthcare depends not only on message clarity but also on the congruence between the advertised message and the actual patient experience (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). When discrepancies arise, particularly when advertising overpromises or appears manipulative, customer trust may be compromised—an effect that can paradoxically reduce loyalty (Khan et al., 2022). The integration of service quality and advertising in influencing loyalty is best understood through the lens of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Khalid et al., 2020a) . IMC emphasizes consistency, coherence, and strategic alignment of all promotional efforts with the actual value proposition experienced by customers (Khalid et al., 2020b) . Belch and Belch emphasize that customer loyalty is maximized when all touchpoints—both promotional and operational—convey a unified brand promise (Wilson et al., 2024). In pharmaceutical services, this means that advertising messages must reflect the actual care experience provided by pharmacists, while service delivery must reinforce the communicated brand identity (AlShammari et al., 2020). Despite this theoretical clarity, empirical applications of IMC in the context of local pharmacies remain limited, particularly in non-metropolitan areas where resource constraints and audience heterogeneity pose challenges to message integration and delivery (Khan et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a **quantitative, causal-associative research design** aimed at examining the influence of service quality and advertising on customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical sector. The study population comprises all customers who made at least two purchases at Apotik Prigi Farma in the six months preceding data collection. Using **purposive sampling**, 138 respondents were selected based on their eligibility to provide

informed responses, particularly those aged 17 years or older and willing to complete the structured questionnaire voluntarily. Data were analyzed using **SPSS version 25**. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic variables and item-level responses. The validity of the instruments was assessed using **Pearson Product Moment correlation**, while internal consistency reliability was evaluated using **Cronbach's Alpha**, with a threshold of 0.70 deemed acceptable. To test the hypotheses, **multiple linear regression analysis** was conducted to examine both partial and simultaneous effects of service quality and advertising on customer loyalty. The regression model was evaluated based on the significance of coefficients ($p < 0.05$), F-statistic for overall model fit, and R^2 for explanatory power. Assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested to validate model robustness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 138 valid responses were collected and analyzed. The sample included 55.8% female and 44.2% male respondents, with the majority (50%) aged between 31 and 50 years. Most respondents were private employees (24.6%), housewives (20.3%), and small business owners (17.4%). These demographics reflect a diverse customer base representative of semi-urban Indonesian communities. Mean scores and standard deviations for all variables indicated generally positive perceptions. Service quality items yielded a mean range of 4.10 to 4.45, suggesting strong agreement with favorable service characteristics. Advertising items showed slightly lower means, ranging from 3.60 to 3.90, indicating moderate-to-positive perceptions. Customer loyalty items recorded high mean values, especially for repeat purchase intention and word-of-mouth recommendation.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

No	Indicator	Correlation Score (Pearson Corellation)	Correlation Prob. [(sig.n(2- tailed)]	Conclution
1.	Service Quality (X_1)			
	- Indicator 1	0,783	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 2	0,719	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 3	0,772	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 4	0,783	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 5	0,719	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 6	0,772	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 7	0,783	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 8	0,719	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 9	0,772	0,000	Valid
2.	Advertise (X_2)			
	- Indicator 1	0,739	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 2	0,739	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 3	0,752	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 4	0,739	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 5	0,739	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 6	0,752	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 7	0,739	0,000	Valid

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No	Indicator	Correlation Score (Pearson Corellation)	Correlation Prob. [(sig.n(2- tailed))]	Conclution
	- Indicator 8	0,739	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 9	0,752	0,000	Valid
3.	Consumer Loyalty (Y ₁)			
	- Indicator 1	0,543	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 2	0,757	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 3	0,760	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 4	0,543	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 5	0,757	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 6	0,760	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 7	0,543	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 8	0,757	0,000	Valid
	- Indicator 9	0,760	0,000	Valid

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability	Notes
Service Quality	0,889	0,70	Reliable
Advertise	0,818	0,70	Reliable
Consumer Loyalty	0,907	0,70	Reliable

Validity was assessed using Pearson Product Moment correlation, where all items for each variable (service quality, advertising, loyalty) showed significant positive correlations with total construct scores ($p < 0.001$). Correlation coefficients ranged from 0.543 to 0.783, indicating strong item–construct relationships. Reliability testing via Cronbach's Alpha yielded values of 0.889 (service quality), 0.818 (advertising), and 0.907 (customer loyalty), all exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency.

Regression Analysis: Partial Effects (Hypotheses H1 and H2)

Coefficients ^a					
		Unstandardize d Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	11.932	1.896		6.294
	ServiceQuality	.836	.072	.927	11.565
	Advertise	-.193	.074	-.209	-2.605

a. Dependent Variable: ConsumerLoyalty

The multiple linear regression model revealed distinct partial effects of the independent variables on customer loyalty. Service quality was found to have a positive and statistically significant influence ($\beta = 0.836$, $t = 11.565$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis

1. This result supports the assumption that higher perceived service quality enhances customer commitment, satisfaction, and intention to repurchase.

Conversely, advertising exhibited a negative and significant effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = -0.193$, $t = -2.605$, $p = 0.010$), supporting Hypothesis 2, but revealing a counterintuitive direction. This suggests that current promotional strategies may be misaligned with customer expectations or perceived as lacking authenticity, thus eroding rather than reinforcing loyalty. Such an inverse relationship indicates the need for critical reassessment of advertising content and channels within the pharmacy's communication strategy.

Regression Analysis: Simultaneous Effects (Hypothesis H3)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3206.306	2	1603.153	107.404	.000 ^b
	Residual	2015.064	135	14.926		
	Total	5221.370	137			

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Advertise, Service Quality

The simultaneous influence of service quality and advertising was evaluated through the F-test of the regression model, which yielded $F = 107.404$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating strong model significance. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated at 0.614, meaning that approximately 61.4% of the variance in customer loyalty can be explained jointly by service quality and advertising. The adjusted R^2 value remained high, confirming the robustness of the model.

Discussion

Service Quality as the Dominant Predictor of Loyalty

The empirical results underscore that service quality is a significant predictor of customer loyalty in the local pharmacy context, as evidenced by a strong standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.836$, $p < 0.001$). This aligns with the theoretical expectation that high service quality—reflected in attributes such as staff reliability, clear medication guidance, empathy, and service responsiveness—forms the backbone of long-term consumer commitment (Guhl et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with the SERVQUAL model, which positions service performance across multiple dimensions as essential to shaping customer perceptions, particularly in health service delivery (Šíma & Ruda, 2019). In semi-urban settings, where healthcare access may be limited and trust in providers is vital, service quality is not merely a differentiator but a prerequisite for relational loyalty (Pribadi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the results resonate with prior studies emphasizing the central role of interpersonal trust and satisfaction in pharmacy settings (Parker et al., 2019). Customers rely on pharmacists not only for dispensing medication but also for providing trustworthy, accurate, and empathetic consultations (Perepelkin & Zhang, 2011). In this light, loyalty is driven more by the relational experience than by transactional incentives (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2015). Local pharmacies can leverage this dynamic by institutionalizing consistent service behaviors, training staff in soft skills, and maintaining transparent communication (Abdullah et al., 2022). Such strategies enhance the perceived value of service, creating emotional and behavioral loyalty that withstands competitive pressures (Samen et al., 2013).

Advertising's Negative Impact

Contrary to traditional assumptions, the study found that advertising exerts a negative and statistically significant effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = -0.193$, $p = 0.010$). This result suggests that existing advertising strategies may be misaligned with consumer values or perceived as inauthentic, as evidenced by the negative impact of deceptive advertising on consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Kim et al., 2017). In sectors that rely heavily on personal interaction and trust, such as pharmacies, promotional messages must reinforce—not replace—the service experience (Nikolova et al., 2017). If advertising exaggerates benefits, uses impersonal channels, or lacks cultural resonance, it can trigger skepticism and dissonance (Jalees et al., 2023). This reinforces the findings of (Abbasi et al., 2022a), who emphasized that congruence between communication and service delivery is essential in healthcare promotion (Abbasi et al., 2022b). This counterintuitive result aligns with the advertising backlash literature, where customers become resistant to messages perceived as manipulative or irrelevant (Nikolova et al., 2017). Particularly in community pharmacies, where reputation is built through face-to-face trust, overly generic or commercial messaging may dilute brand credibility (Ha et al., 2011). Rather than abandoning advertising, local pharmacies must reevaluate the tone, content, and medium of their campaigns (Budianto et al., 2019). A shift toward educational, patient-centered, and localized communication—such as health tips, medication guidance, or patient testimonials—may yield greater alignment with consumer expectations and foster loyalty through credibility and relevance (Nikbin et al., 2021).

Simultaneous Effects and Strategic Integration

Although advertising alone had a negative effect, its combined influence with service quality significantly explained 61.4% of the variance in loyalty ($F = 107.404$, $R^2 = 0.614$), validating the importance of strategic integration "Online Reviews Drive Loyalty: Purchase Decisions Mediate Somethinc Skincare Consumer Behavior" (2025). This finding supports the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory, which posits that loyalty is optimized when all customer touchpoints—advertising, interpersonal service, and post-sale engagement—are unified in messaging and intent (Chaplinskyi & Bozulenko, 2021). When promotional messaging echoes the service experience, it reinforces consumer trust and commitment; however, any inconsistency may create confusion and erode perceived brand reliability (Prodan et al., 2022). In practice, this means that pharmacy marketing efforts must be coordinated across internal operations and external communication (Pebrianti et al., 2021). Service excellence should not only be delivered but also communicated in a way that reflects actual values and competencies (Wihasto, 2019). For Apotik Prigi Farma and similar local pharmacies, integrating marketing content with real service experiences—through behind-the-scenes content, pharmacist-led videos, or localized campaigns—may help foster consumer trust and loyalty (Mohamad, 2020). This integrative approach not only strengthens loyalty but also provides a cost-effective strategy tailored to the limited marketing budgets of small healthcare providers (Kureu et al., 2024).

Managerial Implications for Local Pharmacies

From a managerial perspective, the findings imply that investment in service quality enhancement yields direct returns in customer loyalty. Pharmacy managers should prioritize human resource development focused on interpersonal communication, consultation clarity, and responsiveness (KC et al., 2020). Incorporating customer feedback mechanisms and continuous service audits can help ensure consistent quality across operational dimensions (Rangi et al., 2023). As loyalty is built on trust and relational satisfaction, frontline staff should be empowered as brand ambassadors who reinforce core values through every customer interaction (Agomo & Ogunleye, 2014). Simultaneously, the negative perception of advertising highlights a critical gap in communication strategy (Wood et al., 2011). Pharmacy operators must reassess their promotional tactics—not in volume, but in alignment. Educational messaging tailored to the community's health concerns, delivered via trusted channels such as WhatsApp

groups or local social media, may prove more effective than conventional flyers or discount ads (Hindi et al., 2017). By aligning promotional content with service realities and community needs, local pharmacies can transform advertising from a liability into a loyalty amplifier (Hindi et al., 2019).

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on loyalty by presenting a context-sensitive model that challenges assumptions of advertising's universally positive role. The integration of SERVQUAL within a semi-urban healthcare context allows for conceptual refinement of how relational service and messaging interplay to drive loyalty (Chen et al., 2024). While previous research has largely emphasized either service quality or advertising in isolation, this study shows that their combined influence—and the congruence between them—determines loyalty outcomes. Furthermore, by documenting a negative relationship between advertising and loyalty, this research encourages a more critical and contextualized use of promotional communication in service sectors (Zeqiri, 2017). It also highlights the importance of cultural and relational factors in shaping how consumers interpret and respond to marketing (Shi, 2023). This is particularly relevant in developing economies where literacy levels, trust in institutions, and media preferences vary widely (AlSaleh et al., 2019). As such, the study extends the applicability of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) beyond corporate contexts, demonstrating its relevance in small-scale, community-oriented service environments (Nurchaini et al., 2023).

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The single-location design limits generalizability, and the cross-sectional data restrict causal inference over time. Future studies should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to observe loyalty formation across different stages of customer engagement. Additionally, the analysis focused on two independent variables—service quality and advertising—leaving out potentially influential factors such as price, location, technology use, and brand reputation. Future research could also explore mediating and moderating variables such as trust, perceived value, or digital literacy. Comparative studies between urban and rural pharmacies may reveal geographic differences in loyalty drivers. Moreover, qualitative inquiries could deepen understanding of consumer perceptions regarding mismatched advertising and service experiences. Ultimately, developing a loyalty model that accounts for socio-cultural nuance and service personalization will better inform both marketing theory and practice in the healthcare domain.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigated the impact of service quality and advertising on customer loyalty within a local pharmacy context in Indonesia, using a case study of Apotik Prigi Farma. The empirical results confirmed that service quality has a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on loyalty, underscoring its role as a primary driver of customer retention in health-related services. Conversely, advertising showed a significant but negative effect, revealing a mismatch between promotional content and consumer expectations. When analyzed jointly, both variables explained 61.4% of the variance in customer loyalty, highlighting the relevance of integrating relational service quality with strategic communication efforts. These findings suggest that in the pharmaceutical sector—especially in semi-urban and developing contexts—customer loyalty is not simply a function of visibility or awareness, but of trust, consistency, and authentic engagement. From a practical standpoint, the study emphasizes the importance of enhancing service quality through staff training, service consistency, and personalized care. For pharmacy managers and community healthcare providers, building loyalty requires more than operational efficiency; it demands relational investment. Furthermore, the results call for a re-evaluation of advertising practices, particularly those that are perceived as impersonal or misaligned with the actual service experience. Advertising should serve to reinforce—rather than contradict—the values delivered in-person. Theoretically, this study contributes to the refinement of loyalty models by integrating SERVQUAL and IMC

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frameworks in a healthcare setting. It challenges conventional assumptions about the uniformly positive role of advertising and calls attention to contextual and perceptual nuances that shape customer behavior in trust-intensive services.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. It focused on a single case and employed a cross-sectional design, which limits generalizability and the ability to capture loyalty dynamics over time. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, broader samples across multiple regions, and the inclusion of additional variables such as digital interaction, pricing perception, or brand equity. Qualitative approaches could also enrich understanding of how customers interpret service quality and advertising in culturally specific ways. By addressing these limitations, future studies can build more comprehensive and adaptable models of loyalty, ultimately guiding service providers in designing strategies that are both evidence-based

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