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Examining the Effects of Brand Perception, Trust, Awareness, and Quality on Purchase Decision Making: Evidence from the FMCG Food Sector

Ifra Shehzadi¹

MS Scholar, Department of Business Administration,
University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

Inam Ullah Khan²

Assistant Professor, Department of Business
Administration, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
Correspondence: maliinamullahkhan@gmail.com

Amna Arsalan³

MS Scholar, Department of Business Administration,
University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

Ayesha Maham⁴

MS Scholar, Department of Business Administration,
University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the effect of brand perception, brand trust, brand quality, and brand awareness on purchase decision-making in the FMCG food industry, with perceived quality as a mediator. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were gathered from 500 respondents using purposive sampling. The direct effects of brand trust and brand quality are the strongest, with $\beta = 0.415$ and $\beta = 0.414$, respectively, followed by brand awareness ($\beta = 0.164$) and brand perception ($\beta = 0.091$). Perceived quality was also found to have a significant and positive effect on purchase decision-making ($\beta = 0.381$). The results of the mediation test revealed that perceived quality partially mediates the relationship between brand perception and purchase decisions, while the mediating effect is minimal for brand trust, brand quality, and brand awareness. The model proves to be a good fit, as $R^2 = 0.761$ for perceived quality and $R^2 = 0.671$ for purchase decisions. The paper concludes that brand trust and brand quality are the most prominent drivers, while perceived quality reinforces the impact of brand perception on consumer purchase behavior in the FMCG food industry.

Keywords: Brand Perception, Brand Quality, Brand Trust, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Purchase Decision Making.



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Introduction

In modern society, characterized by keen economic competition in the business world, organizations are literally under pressure to attract and retain ever-elusive customers. The commodity or product landscape has an overwhelming number of products, most of which have very minor differences in structure or cost, leading to a challenge in differentiating between these commodities or products for the average customer. In response to such challenges and difficulties, organizations have increasingly adopted different strategies to influence consumer thinking, feeling, and behavioral aspects concerning a certain brand or commodity in the business world (Özkan et al., 2024). The consumer often seeks information related to the brand or commodity with the aim of utilizing such information in decision-making with regard to purchases, especially in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG).

Brand perception is one of the most significant aspects of a brand that drives consumer behavior. Brand perception is classified as an intangible product that is seen by consumers under certain conditions, such as advertisement influence, face-to-face communication, and past experiences. Positive brand perception can enable consumers to gain confidence regarding a product, thus creating a sense of certainty during the consumption process (Akhsani, 2025). Yet another vital factor that influences consumer decisions is trust. Trust, in the case of a particular brand, can be defined as the confidence level of consumers towards that particular brand. When there arises a situation where there is a constraint on evaluating the quality of a product before using it, trust plays an important role in influencing the decisions. (Mauretta et al., 2024). As a brand, consumers tend to buy products from a company they trust because of their perception of quality products; they can rely on them.

Another consideration that influences the purchase decision-making of consumers is the quality of the brand. Although it is possible to measure the quality of products objectively, in most instances, consumers tend to form their perceptions regarding the quality. The quality of the brand is linked to the extent to which consumers feel that its products are exceptional or better compared to other options (Özkan et al., 2024). When consumers feel that a brand has high quality, they are likely to choose it and influence others to do the same. A perceived high quality of the brand gives companies opportunities to charge higher prices and gain an advantage over their competitors.

Likewise, brand awareness is the foundation upon which consumers base their purchase decisions. Brand awareness can be described as the level of a consumer's awareness of a brand during the process of making purchase decisions. Brands with high awareness are likely to be considered during the process of making purchase decisions because consumers tend to opt for brands that they are aware of and can easily recall (Chughtai et al., 2024). Brand awareness plays a critical role in FMCG markets, where consumers tend to make decisions quite quickly.

Although brand perception, brand trust, brand quality, brand awareness, and perceived quality can be substantial contributors to consumer purchase decisions, in most instances, a consumer does not make a decision based solely on a factor such as the aforementioned. Instead, a consumer process is initiated wherein these various facets of a brand make a cumulative contribution to an eventual consumer product assessment. Among the most significant of these consumer assessments is the type of perceived quality (Özkan et al., 2024). Perceived quality is "the subjective, buyer-based perception of excellence or 'superiority' of a product"; it is, by no means, a reference to technical quality.

Perceived quality is also crucial since it acts as a mediator between the factors related to brands and purchase decision-making. For instance, consumers tend to form perceived quality from the brand perception, trust, awareness, and quality before deciding whether to purchase a product or not (Mauretta et al., 2024). For instance, a brand that is well known and has a positive image and high trust will have a high perceived quality, which will result in an increased willingness to purchase among consumers. Research in the fast-food industry has shown that consumer purchase decisions are significantly influenced by features of social media marketing and that brand trust plays a mediating role in how these marketing features translate into actual purchase decisions, highlighting how consumer decisions are shaped not only by product characteristics but also by their perceptions and confidence in the brand (Hanaysha, 2022).

The impact of branding on customers' choices in the food industry is believed to be enormous. However, numerous studies have demonstrated that branding decisions like brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality only have a direct impact on customer choice when viewed collectively. One of the studies conducted to determine the involvement of customers in the food business established that a key determinant, which involved brand awareness, image, and quality, had a significant impact on customer decisions, particularly in the context of returning to their brands. (García-Salirrosas et al., 2024).

The problem statement is as follows: Studies conducted by Özkan et al. (2024) and Mushtaq et al. (2024) have demonstrated that brand perception, trust, brand awareness, and quality are some of the factors affecting the buying decision of customers. However, it remains unclear as to whether these factors actually influence the purchase decisions of the customers in any way, in particular in a market where competition is high and products are closely related. In particular, it is uncertain whether perceived quality—the quality that customers trust and consider beneficial—guides their choice of products, since perceived quality is shaped by customers' beliefs and trust in the brand rather than by objective attributes alone (Mauretta et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is also unclear what branding elements strongly influence customers' buying behaviors (Chughtai et al., 2024). This gap is even more apparent as it relates to the emerging market context, where consumer behaviors could differ from those in the developed market/demographics. The income levels and cultural values do have an effect on brands and how they affect decisions about brand quality. As a result, there is a gap between the two settings that requires independent research concerning this topic to cover this gap and provide new insights that analyze the synergistic effect of brand perception, trust, quality, and awareness on purchase decision-making processes, where perceived quality is a mediating variable. The findings of this paper will definitely assist marketers in creating better branding models, which will have an influence on the perceived quality and acquisition of purchase decision-making.

The specific objectives of this study are to understand the role of brand perception in influencing customers' purchasing decisions in the food industry. Researchers have acknowledged that brand perception plays a significant role in determining customer intentions (Ling et al., 2023). It further aims at understanding the impact of brand trust, brand awareness, brand quality, and perceived quality on the buying intentions of the customers; these are known to influence the purchasing behavior of customers in the products of food FMCG. Moreover, the research tries to comprehend that the perceived quality is a mediator amid branding elements and purchase choices as accepted by researchers (Faruq, 2024). Finally, it also tries to establish which branding variables have a significant influence on customer purchasing behavior when buying food products.

Research Questions

How does brand perception affect customers' purchase decision-making in the food industry?

What is the effect of brand trust, brand awareness, brand quality, and perceived quality on customers' intention to purchase food products?

Does perceived quality mediate the relationship between all factors of brand and purchase decision-making?

Which of the variables tested in this study has the most significant effect on customers' intention to purchase food products?

Literature Review

In recent years, brand perception has become a major concept in comprehending consumer behavior. Perception denotes the manner in which consumers see a brand and make sense of it, depending on their experiences, values, and outside factors like advertisements or word-of-mouth. According to Smith and Johnson (2023), perception of the brand is one aspect that should be considered in the process of consumer decision-making. It is easy to perceive that consumers can establish an attitude toward a given brand according to their experiences. Additionally, they can also base their perceptions on their personal attitudes toward other consumers and their positioning in the market. These claims were supported by Miller and Zhang (2024) in their research; they found that perception of the brand in a positive manner is greatly linked to customer loyalty and ultimately to attitude toward brand advocacy that can lead to decision-making. Recent research indicates that a strong, consistent perception of quality and trust in the brands is more likely to induce the purchase again. Negative brand perceptions, such as distrustful or low-quality product impressions, serve to considerably lower the appeal of a brand. Thus, brands have to be sensitive to their image and make sure consumer perceptions are in agreement with the personal brand image they are trying to portray (Smith & Johnson, 2023). Brand trust is another crucial factor that significantly influences consumer behavior and purchasing patterns. When one trusts a brand, it means that they have a sense that the brand will do what it promises. In the contemporary market, where customers are no longer restrained by an information deficit, trust is emerging as a controversial factor in conquering uncertainty and the sense of danger (Choi and Lee, 2022). Brand trust plays a significant role in the purchase; when consumers want to purchase products in bulk, they do research before buying them. The product is presented to them in advance before they can purchase. (Choi and Lee, 2022) emphasize the problem posed by the fact that a consumer trusts a brand once it has achieved transparency, reliability, and honest business practices. This credibility is not only able to generate instant buying but also lays the foundation for building customer relationships over time. Customer loyalty is achieved through brand trust, which is a precursor to word-of-mouth marketing, which in turn reinforces the brand's market position. Various studies by Green and Harris (2025) have revealed that a good brand trust foundation is a significant contributor to consumer loyalty, and individuals who trust a brand have more chances of repeating buying and referring other people to a particular brand.

Brand quality is the perceived quality of products or services that a brand provides. Good perceptions would help increase customer satisfaction and lead to an increased chance of repurchases. According to Carter and Thompson (2023), perceived brand quality is one of the most essential factors that influence consumers' decisions. They discovered that the consumers are more likely to consider brands whose image is characterized by the high quality of products as being reliable, and this factor directly reflects on whether or not consumers will purchase the product.

Brand quality is frequently one of the crucial determining factors in the purchase decisions in such fields as electronics and automobiles, where the product performance and its longevity are highly appreciated (Anderson and Roberts, 2024). The brand's quality is based on product performance, customer service, and perceived durability. This fact is because consumers, especially in markets with a high level of competition, are becoming conscious of the long-term value that a brand can provide them, and this is manifested in their buying behavior (Kim et al., 2022). Research has shown that a brand that is perceived to deliver high quality faces an increased rate of customer satisfaction, positive reviews, and consumer loyalty.

Brand awareness is a state in which consumers recognize and are acquainted with a brand. Brand awareness is important as one of the pillars of consumer decision-making because no brand can set itself in the competitive market without creating a name. The more familiar a consumer is with a brand, the higher the chance he or she will put it into consideration when making a purchase. According to Patel and Kumar (2023), good brand awareness is very influential on consumer behavior, particularly in saturated markets in which there is more than one brand competing for the consumer. Top-of-mind brands are more likely than any other brand to be selected by the consumer because familiarity leads to trust and comfort (Simmons and Roberts, 2025). Moreover, brand awareness is promoted in the different marketing channels, such as digital marketing, social media interaction, and PR. According to Jackson and Lee (2024), consumers are more likely to remember brands that are willing to invest heavily in creating numerous awareness campaigns through online platforms and traditional media. Such visibility leads to familiarity, which makes the brand more viable to be checked when making a purchase decision.

The perceived quality is considered to mediate between the independent variables of the brand and consumer purchase decision-making. It is a measure of how consumers view the overall excellence of anything that a brand offers due to several factors, including the quality, performance, and customer experience. Lee and Park (2022) state that perceived quality increases the strength of brand perception, trust, and awareness, which affects consumer behavior. Their study revealed that a brand of high perceived quality has more chances of transforming positive perceptions of the brand into actual purchases. Perceived quality is an intermediary between the decision-making processes, particularly in the situation when other brand attributes, including trust or reputation, do play a role. Clients prefer the brands that they find have high quality, irrespective of the prices (Carter and Thompson, 2023). Thus, perceived quality remains an impetus in purchase decision-making even in highly sensitive competitive markets.

The dependent variable in this research is purchase decision-making, which can be defined as the process by which consumers consider alternatives and whether to buy a specific product or a brand. Such factors, like "brand perception, brand trust, brand quality, and many other cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors," combine to affect consumer purchasing decisions. " Evans and Moore (2023) state that the procedure of purchase decision-making is a powerful indicator of the actual consumer behavior and performance on the market. Research shows that consumers are more likely to buy from brands they trust, that are good, and that are established. In addition, the interaction of the variables reinforces the decision-making results. An example of this is that a brand with a high level of trust is more likely to be selected by consumers (Anderson and Roberts, 2024). Purchase decision-making knowledge assists companies in developing suitable branding. Strategies that are in accordance with the consumer preferences and expectations. Quality, awareness, trust, brand perception, and purchase decision-making heavily influence consumer perception. These brand variables are equally verified by the recent research. An important factor in the decision-making process of a consumer since they have a dissimilar specific need. These

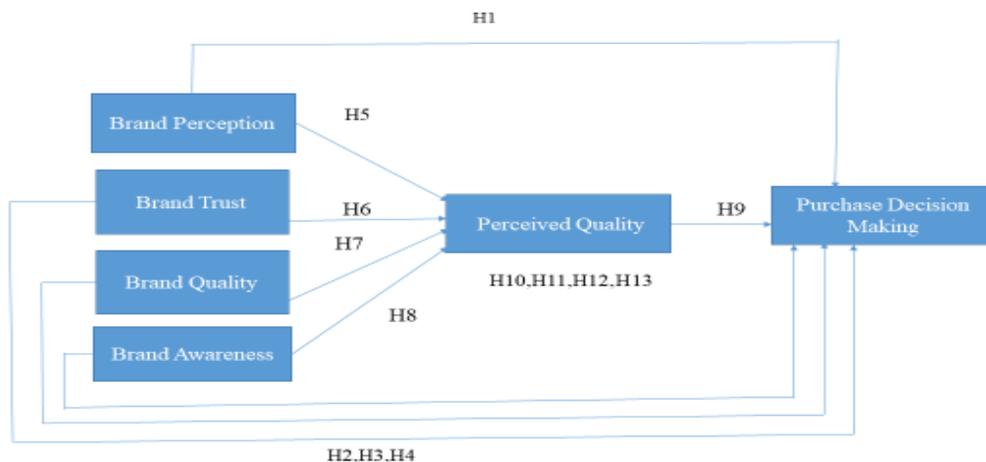
variables influence the consumer's purchase decision. In this regard, the brands are supposed to target. And improving their image, creating trust and quality, and creating awareness in order to make purchase decisions.

Hypothesis

- H1:** The brand perception has a significant effect on purchasing decision-making in the food industry in the FMCG food sector
- H2:** Brand trust is a significant and strong influence on the purchase decision-making of the FMCG food industry.
- H3:** Brand quality is a strongly significant factor in purchase decision-making in the FMCG. food industry.
- H4:** Brand Awareness has a significant impact on purchase decision-making.
- H5:** Perceived quality has a significant effect on brand perception.
- H6:** Brand trust has a significant impact on perceived quality.
- H7:** The brand quality significantly affects perceived quality.
- H8:** Brand Awareness has significantly impact on perceived quality.
- H9:** Perceived quality has a significant relationship with purchase decision-making.
- H10:** Perceived quality plays a mediator between brand perception and purchase decision making.
- H11:** There is a mediating effect of perceived quality between brand trust and purchase decision-making.
- H12:** The perceived quality mediates the relationship between the brand quality and purchase decision-making.
- H13:** Perceived Quality mediates the relationship between brand awareness and purchase decision making.

Research Model

Figure 1:



Research Methodology

The study is based on a quantitative research design, which tries to determine the effect of brand perception, brand trust, brand quality, and brand awareness on purchase decision-making and perceived quality as the mediator. The data was gathered in the food sector. On a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling, the respondents are chosen due to the fact that they allow relevant and valuable information. This was a cross-sectional study whose research was done on a sample of 500 respondents. Data were collected by the use of a structured questionnaire comprising five scales. The scale of brand perception has 4 subscales, which are functional perception, affective perception, reputation, and brand experience, and interaction has 20 questions. (Barajas-Portas, 2015) While brand trust was measured using two scales: the reliability items description and the intentionality items description, and 8 questions (Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003). Brand quality was measured using 7 items adapted from Chepchirchir & Leting (2015), while brand awareness was measured using 9 items that probed the respondents' familiarity with the firm's products (Sangani, 2012). Perceived quality was measured by a scale adapted from an Exploratory Investigation into Customer Perceived Value of Food Products in Vietnam, which originally consisted of 19 items in four dimensions: functional, economic, emotional, and social, but one item was deleted after factor analysis because of low loading, resulting in an 18-item scale (Vu et al., 2015). Purchase decision-making was measured by a 12-item scale that concentrated on the FMCG sector (Kusá et al., 2014). The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (Arsalan et al., 2026).

Data Analysis

For data analysis, we used Cronbach's Alpha, correlation, and mediation. The value of the Cronbach's alpha of Brand Perception is 0.739. The value of Cronbach's alpha of Brand Trust is 0.913, the value of Cronbach's alpha of Brand Quality is 0.954, and the value of Cronbach's alpha of Brand Awareness is 0.934. The value of perceived quality is 0.871, and the value of purchase decision making is 0.904. All AVE values are greater than the suggested cutoff of 0.50; this validates the level of convergent validity in the data. BP = 0.654; BT= 0.720; BQ= 0.856; BA = 0.701; PQ=0.843 and PDM = 0.813.

Correlation analysis is done to investigate the relationships between variables and the nature of these associations in binary form. Brand Perception (BP), Brand Trust (BT), Brand Quality (BQ), Brand Awareness (BA), and Perceived Quality (PQ) as mediator have a positive relationship with the DV, which is Purchase Decision Making (PDM).

Table 1: *Correlation Matrix*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
BP	1					
BT	0.62**	1				
BQ	0.58**	0.66**	1			
BA	0.54**	0.49**	0.52**	1		
PQ	0.65**	0.71**	0.76**	0.60**	1	
PDM	0.57**	0.63**	0.68**	0.55**	0.74**	1

p< 0.01 (two-tailed); ** indicates statistical significance.

Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 1, all the variables are positively and significantly correlated at $p < 0.01$. Brand perception has moderate positive correlations with brand trust ($r = 0.62$), brand quality ($r = 0.58$), brand awareness ($r = 0.54$), perceived quality ($r = 0.65$), and purchase decision making ($r = 0.57$). Brand trust is strongly related to brand quality ($r = 0.66$), perceived quality ($r = 0.71$), and purchase decision making ($r = 0.63$). Brand quality has a strong positive link with perceived quality ($r = 0.76$) and purchase decision making ($r = 0.68$). Brand awareness is positively linked to perceived quality ($r = 0.60$) and purchase decision making ($r = 0.55$). Perceived quality is strongly positively related to purchase decision making, with a correlation of 0.74, which therefore confirms that it has a significant role in affecting the consumers' purchase decisions.

Table 2: *Inference of mediation*

Hypothesis	Direct Beta without Mediator	Direct Beta with Mediator	Indirect Beta	Mediator type observed
BP-PQ-PDM	Beta=0.1386 P=0.0000	B=0.0914 P=0.0003	B= 0.141	Partial mediation
BT-PQ-PDM	Beta=0.8043 P=0.0000	B=0.4150 P=0.0000	B=0.0175	Partial mediation
BQ-PQ-PDM	Beta=0.8123 P=0.0000	B=0.4140 P=0.0000	B=0.0171	Partial Mediation
BA-PQ-PDM	Beta= 0.5221 P=0.0000	B=0.1641 P=0.000	B= 0.0160	Partial Mediation

By observing Table 2, we can see how the relationship between branding factors and the final purchase decision occurs via the mediator of perceived quality (PQ). In the case of brand perception (BP), we see that the direct effect on the purchase decision-making process is given by the coefficient ($\beta = 0.0914$), but the indirect effect, mediated by the PQ factor, is substantially larger at ($\beta = 0.141$). In the case of brand awareness (BA), we see that its direct effect on the final decision is given by the coefficient ($\beta = 0.1641$), but the indirect effect, mediated by the PQ factor, is actually ($\beta = 0.0160$).

For the effect of brand trust (BT), the direct effect is $\beta = 0.4150$, whereas the indirect effect via PQ is $\beta = 0.0175$. As far as the effect of brand quality (BQ) is concerned, the direct effect is $\beta = 0.4140$, whereas the indirect effect is $\beta = 0.0171$. As far as brand awareness, the direct effect is $\beta = 0.1641$, whereas the indirect effect is $\beta = 0.0160$. It has been observed that perceived quality plays a significant mediating role for brand perception (BP) only in influencing consumers' purchase decisions, whereas its mediating effect is minimal for brand trust (BT), brand quality (BQ), and brand awareness (BA). This indicates that BP relies more on PQ to affect purchase decisions, while BT, BQ, and BA primarily influence purchase decisions directly.

Figure 2: *BP-PQ-PDM*

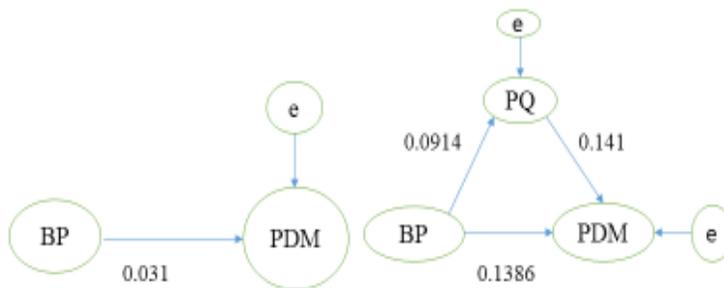


Figure 2. Path BA-PQ-PDM

Figure 3: *BT-PQ-PDM*

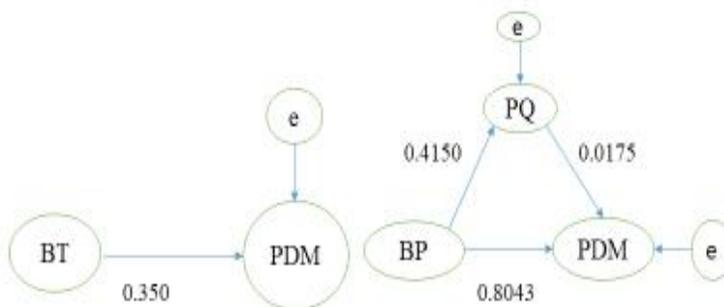


Figure 3 . Path BT-PQ-PDM

Figure 4: *BQ-PQ-PDM*

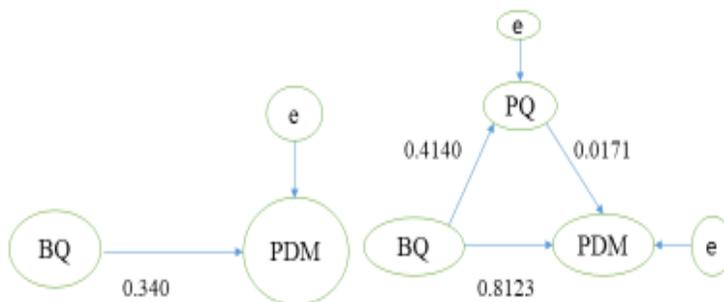


Figure 4.Path BQ-PQ-PDM

Figure 5: BA-PQ-PDM

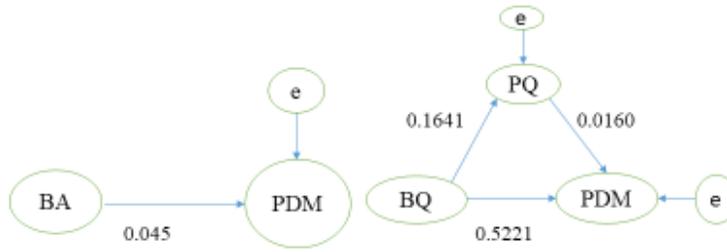


Figure 5.Path BA-PQ-PDM

Based on the figures above, it can be observed that perceived quality is an essential mediating factor in the relationship between branding factors and purchase decision-making. The findings show that brand trust, brand quality, and brand awareness have a direct effect on the purchase decision-making process, while the mediating effect of perceived quality is minimal. The results suggest that these branding factors actually affect purchase decision-making through their impact on the perception of quality by the consumers. In other words, these factors are positively correlated with purchase decisions because of their impact on the perception of quality.

Table 3: SRMR Model Fit and R Square (R^2)

	Value	Results
Saturated Model	0.048	Accepted
Estimated Model	0.048	Accepted

Model Fit and Validity: The SRMR value of 0.048 for both saturated and estimated models indicates a good model fit, well below the 0.08 threshold. This confirms that the proposed model is an accurate representation of the data obtained, making it appropriate from the perspective of content validity for PLS-SEM.

Table 4: R-squared (R^2)

	R Square (R^2)	Interpretation
PQ	0.761	Strong Explanatory power
PDM	0.671	Moderate predictive power

As shown in Table 4 above, the R^2 value of perceived quality is 0.761. This implies that 76.1% of the variance of perceived quality is explained by the brand perception, brand quality, brand trust, and brand awareness variables. The table shows a significant predictive potential of the variables for explaining consumers' perceived quality. Moreover, the R^2 value of purchase decision-making is 0.671. This implies that 67.1% of the variance of purchase decision-making is explained by the brand perception, brand quality, brand trust, and brand awareness variables, both directly and indirectly via perceived quality. This implies that the predictive potential of the factors is moderate to high, indicating that the factors significantly influence decision-making from the perspective of consumers.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	B (Path Coefficient)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
BP->PDM	0.0914	12.655	<0.001	Supported
BT->PDM	0.4150	22.785	<0.001	Supported
BQ->PDM	0.4140	4.769	<0.001	Supported
BA->PDM	0.1641	11.655	<0.001	Supported
BP->PQ	0.371	14.794	<0.001	Supported
BT->PQ	0.046	2.344	<0.05	Supported
BQ->PQ	0.045	2.345	<0.05	Supported
BA->PQ	0.042	2.324	<0.05	Supported
PQ->PDM	0.381	14.795	<0.001	Supported

Table 5 demonstrates the direct and indirect effects of branding factors on the purchase decision-making (PDM) process. Based on the table, the direct effects of branding on PDM include brand perception (BP-PDM) $\beta = 0.0914$, brand trust (BT-PDM) $\beta = 0.4150$, brand quality (BQ-PDM) $\beta = 0.4140$, and brand awareness (BA-PDM) $\beta = 0.1641$. This shows that brand trust and brand quality have high direct effects on brand purchase decisions, while brand perception and brand awareness have small direct effects on such decisions.

When considering the effect of perceived quality (PQ), the strongest effect is seen on BP, with a beta value of 0.371, followed by BT, BQ, and BA with beta values of 0.046, 0.045, and 0.042, respectively. It has also been seen that the effect of PQ on purchase decision making is quite strong, with a beta value of 0.381 on $PQ \rightarrow PDM$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results derived provide substantial evidence towards the notion that branding factors hold considerable importance in shaping consumers' purchase decision-making process for the food sector, particularly for FMCG operations. The results indicate that, at $\beta = 0.0914$, $p < 0.001$, brand perception, at $\beta = 0.4150$, $p < 0.001$, brand trust, at $\beta = 0.4140$, $p < 0.001$, brand quality, and at $\beta = 0.1641$, $p < 0.001$, brand awareness have all positively and statistically influenced the purchase decision-making process for consumers. Out of these, it appears that brand trust has emerged as the strongest factor, suggesting the willingness of consumers to purchase food products from particular or specific brands due to associated perceptions of trust and a relatively higher reliability. "Not surprisingly, brand quality, although moderate in its impact, is perceived mainly in terms of the consumers' perception rather than actual brand quality." (Ling et al., 2023)

This study also revealed that branding factors are among the most significant influencers of perceived quality. Here, brand perception emerges as the most prominent factor ($\beta = 0.371$), followed by brand trust, brand quality, and brand awareness. This supports our contention that the perceived quality of a product by consumers is deeply associated with their general perception and acceptance of the brand rather than external factors. This trend has been supported by recent research that stresses that perceived quality involves a subjective assessment that incorporates brand perception and experiences (Nadjwa et al., 2024).

In addition, the influence of perceived quality is significant and positive on purchase decision-making, as shown by the value of $\beta = 0.381$. This reveals that perceived quality still remains an important factor despite the fact that the time devoted to consumer decision-making is diminishing. From the results on mediation analysis, it is evident that while perceived quality partially mediated the relationships between the dimensions of branding perception/brand trust/brand quality, and brand awareness, this suggests that consumers are likely to switch from branding efforts to purchase decisions as mediated by their perception of quality. The results are in line with recent empirical investigations concerning the important role of perceived quality as a mediator between various branding strategies and consumers' behaviors (Tarta & Pasaribu, 2024).

In conclusion, the mediation analysis (Table 2) investigates the role of perceived quality (PQ) as a mediator between branding factors and purchase decision-making (PDM). The findings show that brand perception (BP) exerts a significantly stronger indirect effect on PDM via perceived quality ($\beta = 0.141$), which is greater than its direct effect ($\beta = 0.0914$). This finding suggests that the role of perceived quality in bridging brand perception and actual purchase decisions is significant.

In the case of brand trust (BT), brand quality (BQ), and brand awareness (BA), the indirect effects are relatively small ($\beta = 0.0175$, 0.0171 , and 0.0160 , respectively) compared to their direct effects ($\beta > 0.4$ for BT and BQ; $\beta = 0.1641$ for BA). This finding suggests that the role of perceived quality as a mediator is insignificant for these branding factors, and their impact on purchase decisions is more direct rather than indirect through consumers' perception of quality.

Limitation and Future Direction

Although the above study is useful, like all other studies, it has its own limitations that are indicative of the scope of future research in the same area. For instance, the above study is based only on cross-sectional research, which indicates the perception of consumers only from one particular point in time. Thus, in the future, more longitudinal research needs to be conducted in the same area to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Moreover, while purposive sampling was adopted in the above study, in the future, probability sampling needs to be adopted to establish more generalized responses from the sample members. In the above study, while the factors of brand perception, trust in the brand, quality of the brand, and awareness of the brand are included, price sensitivity, customer satisfaction, loyalty towards the brand, and promotional activities are not included in the above suggested models. Again, the research is specific to the food/FMCG sector, and hence it is expected that further research will be conducted to extend it to other sectors/cultures to increase generalizability. Finally, since this is a self-reported study, a degree of respondent bias is inevitable, and it is expected that further research will be undertaken to substantiate more objective results.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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