



Understanding Purchase Intention through Customer Relationship Management, Brand Equity, and Perceived Value: A Qualitative Study of Modern Retail Consumers in Sumatra

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Abstract

In the increasingly competitive modern retail context, understanding the formation of purchase intentions has become essential. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how purchase intentions are shaped through customer relationship management (CRM), brand equity, and perceived value, while also considering the roles of perceived product quality and price perception among modern retail consumers in Sumatra. To achieve this objective, an exploratory qualitative approach was employed to capture consumers' experiences and subjective interpretations in the purchase decision-making process. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with regular customers of modern retail outlets in Sumatra and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes. The findings indicate that purchase intentions are formed through an integrative evaluative process rather than through isolated assessments of product attributes. In this process, CRM fosters trust and emotional comfort, while brand equity reduces perceived risk by providing a sense of consistency and reliability. Furthermore, perceptions of product quality and price are interpreted contextually, shaping consumers' judgments of fairness and functional value. These elements ultimately converge in perceived value, which acts as a central mechanism linking consumer experiences to purchase intentions. Overall, this study contributes to the marketing literature by offering a more context-sensitive understanding of purchase intention formation and provides practical insights for retailers in developing relationship-oriented and value-based strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the modern retail sector in Indonesia represents an important indicator of national economic transformation, as the trade sector serves as a major contributor to GDP and a key driver of household consumption (Statistik, 2025). This sector significantly contributes to trade growth and job creation, aligning with global objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Nations, 2023b). Furthermore, the dynamics of modern retail reflect ongoing innovation in industry and trade infrastructure (SDG 9), while also highlighting challenges related to responsible consumption patterns (SDG 12), particularly in the context of increasingly complex and diverse consumer choices (Nations, 2023c, 2023a).

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Technological advancements, marketing digitalization, and increasing global competition have made consumer behavior in modern retail increasingly complex (Lestari, 2026; Tulebayeva & Kozhamkulova, 2025). Such behavior is not only influenced by product attributes but also shaped by value experiences, brand relationships, and sociocultural contexts (Fournier, 1998; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This complexity is reflected in the consumer decision-making process, particularly in the formation of purchase intention as a cognitive stage preceding the actual purchase (De Cannière et al., 2009; Rusti et al., 2024).

In the context of modern retail in Indonesia, consumer dynamics have become increasingly complex alongside rising expectations for more personalized and meaningful shopping experience (Endarwati et al., 2024). Consumers no longer evaluate products solely based on their functional attributes, such as perceived quality or price, but also consider their relationships with brands or retailers as well as the value experienced during interactions (Sander et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding consumers' purchase intentions is essential, as it serves as an early indicator of the likelihood of actual purchase behavior in the future (Wardhana, 2024). Purchase intention is influenced not only by product and marketing factors but also by consumers' perceived value, their relationships with retailers (CRM), and brand equity (Hakim et al., 2017).

The marketing literature suggests that brand equity and perceived value can influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through mediating mechanisms involving brand preference and loyalty (Erislan, 2025; Sanjaya, 2012; Setiawan et al., 2023). A number of prior quantitative studies have emphasized the relationships between variables such as perceived quality, price, brand equity, and consumer trust in shaping purchase intention (Ajzen, 1991; Kytö et al., 2019; Latifah & Fikriah, 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025; Rosada & Setiawan, 2025). Perceived value has been identified as a key determinant of purchase intention, as consumers simultaneously evaluate the trade-off between benefits and costs (Latifah & Fikriah, 2024; Setyaningrum & Dewi, 2025). Furthermore, the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) approach highlights that brand trust plays a crucial role in enhancing purchase intention and may function as a mediator between marketing variables and purchase intention (Latifah & Fikriah, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025; Rijikard, 2025; Yatnikaputri & Hidayat, 2025).

Although quantitative research is capable of providing robust statistical evidence regarding causal relationships among variables, this approach tends to be limited in explaining the process through which purchase intentions are formed from the perspective of consumers' subjective experiences. In particular, relational interactions and social context have not been extensively explored in depth. As a result, the existing literature still leaves a gap in understanding the meanings, perceptions, and experiential narratives that shape purchase intentions, especially in regions characterized by sociocultural diversity such as Sumatra.

Therefore, an exploratory qualitative study is essential to address this gap by examining how factors such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), brand equity, product quality, price experience, and perceived value shape purchase intentions and decisions, particularly in regions such as Sumatra, which are characterized by sociocultural diversity and unique consumer characteristics. Accordingly, this study aims to understand the process of purchase intention formation from the perspective of modern retail consumers in Sumatra by exploring the interaction between CRM, brand equity, quality, and price experience, as well as how these factors contribute to perceived value and purchase decisions in real-life contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach with an interpretive design. This approach is selected because the primary objective of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of how modern retail consumers form purchase intentions through their experiences related to Customer Relationship Management (CRM), brand equity, and perceived value, which is shaped by their perceptions of product quality and price.

An exploratory qualitative approach is particularly appropriate when the phenomenon under investigation requires an in-depth conceptual and contextual understanding from the perspective of the research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach enables researchers to explore

consumers' meanings, perceptions, and interpretations of their shopping experiences, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Accordingly, this study focuses on understanding how and why purchase intentions are formed, rather than testing causal relationships among variables.

Research Context and Object

This study is conducted within the context of modern retail in Sumatra, Indonesia, encompassing supermarkets, national chain minimarkets, and department stores. Sumatra is selected due to its diverse social, economic, and cultural characteristics, which provide a rich context for exploring consumer experiences. In addition, the growth of modern retail in this region, coupled with intense competition, highlights the importance of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies, brand strengthening, and value creation in influencing purchase intentions.

The research subjects are modern retail consumers who have regular shopping experience and are able to reflect on these experiences narratively. This study does not focus on specific retail companies but rather on consumers' subjective experiences in general.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The selection of participants was conducted using purposive sampling, which involves selecting individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria for participants were as follows: (1) consumers who had shopped at modern retail outlets at least twice within the past three months; (2) individuals aged 18 years or older; and (3) those capable of articulating their experiences and perceptions in a reflective manner.

The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, that is, the point at which additional interviews no longer yield significant new information (Guest et al., 2006). Accordingly, the sample size was adjusted based on the depth and variation of data obtained in the field.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. This method was selected because it provides a balance between a structured set of guiding questions and the flexibility to explore participants' experiences in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide was developed based on the main constructs of the study, including consumers' experiences related to Customer Relationship Management (CRM), such as service interactions, communication, and attention, perceptions of brand equity, perceptions of product quality and price, the formation of perceived value, and future purchase intentions. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were subsequently analyzed systematically to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then analyzed systematically to ensure data accuracy.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study was conducted using an inductive thematic analysis approach, which enables the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of meaning that emerge directly from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process began with data familiarization by repeatedly reading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context, followed by initial coding through the identification of relevant units of meaning. Subsequently, themes were developed by grouping related codes into preliminary categories, which were then reviewed to ensure their consistency and alignment with the data. Each theme was then clearly defined and named to clarify its conceptual meaning, and the final stage involved constructing the interpretation of the findings by linking the analysis to the research context and the underlying theoretical framework. This inductive approach ensures that the resulting themes are grounded in the data, thereby supporting the exploratory nature of the study (Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through member checking. Transferability was achieved by providing a detailed description of the research context. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through thorough documentation of the research process and the use of an audit trail.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the principles of qualitative research ethics. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to confidentiality, and their freedom to withdraw at any time. The identities of participants were kept confidential, and the data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with modern retail consumers in Sumatra revealed five key themes that explain the formation of purchase intentions: (1) relational experiences as the foundation of consumer trust, (2) brand equity as a source of security and consistency, (3) perceived product quality as evidence of functional value, (4) price perception as a representation of fairness and appropriateness, and (5) perceived value as an integrative mechanism that connects all consumer experiences to purchase intention. These findings indicate that purchase intention is not formed in a linear or mechanistic manner but rather through a holistic and contextually grounded process of subjective evaluation.

These results reinforce contemporary perspectives in the marketing literature, which suggest that purchase intention is the outcome of accumulated consumption experiences rather than merely a response to a single marketing stimulus such as price or promotion (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the context of modern retail, particularly in regions characterized by sociocultural diversity such as Sumatra, relational experiences and perceived value play a central role in shaping consumer decision-making.

Customer Relationship Management and Relational Experience

The findings indicate that consumers primarily interpret Customer Relationship Management (CRM) through the quality of their interactions with retailers, both direct (e.g., interactions with store employees) and indirect (e.g., promotional communication and after-sales services). Staff friendliness, responsiveness, and service consistency emerge as key indicators that retailers value and care about consumers as individuals. These positive relational experiences foster a sense of comfort and trust, which ultimately encourages repeat purchases.

These findings are consistent with relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes that trust and commitment are the fundamental foundations of long-term relationships between consumers and firms (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Empirical studies also demonstrate that customer relationship quality significantly influences purchase intention through increased emotional attachment and perceived relational value (Iglesias et al., 2019; Li et al., 2025). From a qualitative perspective, CRM is not merely perceived as a technological system or loyalty program but rather as a lived experience encountered by consumers at every touchpoint. This perspective aligns with Payne & Frow (2005) and is further supported by Verhoef et al. (2015), who highlight that the effectiveness of CRM largely depends on how consumers perceive the quality of the relationship.

Brand Equity as a Source of Trust and Risk Reduction

The second theme indicates that retail brand equity serves as a source of trust and a sense of security for consumers when facing uncertainty in purchase decisions. Informants tend to associate strong retail brands with consistent product quality, professional store management, and predictable shopping experiences. In situations where consumers are confronted with numerous choices, brands with positive reputations function as heuristic cues in the decision-making process.

These findings are consistent with the concept of brand equity as a risk-reduction mechanism in consumer behavior (Keller, 2013). Empirical studies also demonstrate that brand equity has both direct and indirect effects on purchase intention through enhanced brand trust and perceived value (Aziz & Albari, 2023; Febrian & Ahluwalia, 2020; Tresna et al., 2021). From a qualitative perspective, consumers do not always explicitly articulate the dimensions of brand equity; instead, they express it through habitual behavior, situational loyalty, and repeated preferences toward particular retailers. This is in line with Aaker (1991), who argues that brand value is internalized in consumers' memory and experiences, thereby implicitly influencing purchase decisions over time.

Product Quality and Experience-Based Evaluation

Perceived product quality emerges as a dominant theme in consumers' narratives, particularly in relation to product freshness, brand variety, and consistency of quality over time. Consumers evaluate quality not only based on the physical attributes of products but also on how these products are managed, maintained, and presented by retailers. Consistency of quality serves as a key indicator in assessing the reliability of retailers in meeting consumer expectations.

These findings are consistent with Zeithaml (1988) who conceptualizes quality as a subjective construct shaped by experience and expectations rather than solely by the technical characteristics of a product. Empirical research in the modern retail context further shows that perceived product quality plays a significant role in enhancing purchase intention and repeat purchasing through the formation of perceived value and satisfaction (Aliya et al., 2026; Sari & Nurhadi, 2025). From a qualitative perspective, quality is understood as a cumulative experience, which explains why consumers maintain purchase intentions despite minor variations in specific product attributes.

Price Considerations and Perceived Fairness

The next theme relates to price perception, where consumers do not view price solely as a monetary cost but also as an indicator of fairness and reasonableness. The findings show that consumers are willing to pay higher prices as long as they perceive them to be commensurate with product quality, shopping convenience, and the services received. Conversely, prices perceived as unfair can diminish perceived value, even when product quality is considered satisfactory.

These findings align with the price fairness literature, which emphasizes that price perception is shaped by social comparisons, prior experiences, and situational context (Malc et al., 2021; Viglia & Abrate, 2014; Xu et al., 2025). In the context of modern retail, price perception is also increasingly influenced by the availability of digital information and social media, which shape consumers' expectations of what constitutes a fair price (Menhard et al., 2025).

The qualitative approach adopted in this study provides deeper insights into how consumers interpret and negotiate the meaning of price in their everyday lives. This becomes particularly relevant in regions with varying levels of purchasing power, such as Sumatra, where perceptions of price fairness may differ across consumer groups.

Perceived Value as an Integrative Mechanism

Perceived value emerges as a central theme that integrates the entirety of consumer experiences in shaping purchase intentions. Consumers evaluate value as a balance between the benefits received whether functional, emotional, or social and the costs incurred. Value is derived not only from the product itself but also from the sense of comfort, trust, and satisfaction experienced throughout the purchasing process.

These findings are consistent with the consumer value framework proposed by Holbrook (2002), and are supported by contemporary studies that position perceived value as a key mediator between customer experience and purchase intention (Langit & Asikin, 2025; Octaviani & Ekawati, 2023). In this study, perceived value functions as an interpretive mechanism that integrates various constructs, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), brand equity, perceived product quality, and price perception, into a comprehensive evaluation. When the level of perceived value is high, purchase intentions tend to form more spontaneously, without requiring complex rational deliberation.

Formation of Purchase Intention

In this study, purchase intention is understood as an intention that develops gradually through repeated experiences and consumer reflection. Informants do not always explicitly plan their purchases; rather, purchase intention emerges as a consequence of trust, comfort, and confidence in the value offered by the retailer.

These findings extend the understanding of the Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Ajzen (1991), by demonstrating that purchase intention is not always rational and structured as assumed in the model. Instead, purchase intention is often formed intuitively and experientially, aligning with the perspective of constructive consumer choice, which emphasizes that consumer preferences and decisions are dynamically constructed during the decision-making process rather than being predetermined (Bettman et al., 1998).

LIMITATION

Limitations or constraints in a research study refer to factors that restrict the scope, methodology, or results of the research, such as sample limitations, measurement tools, time constraints, or available data. Limitations do not indicate weaknesses but rather emphasize transparency in explaining aspects that may affect the generalizability or interpretation of the research findings.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory qualitative study demonstrates that purchase intention among modern retail consumers in Sumatra is not formed through isolated evaluations of product attributes, but rather through an integrative and experience-based process. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) emerges as a relational foundation that fosters trust and emotional comfort, while brand equity functions as a cognitive shortcut that reduces perceived risk and reinforces confidence in purchase decisions. Perceived product quality and price are interpreted subjectively through repeated consumption experiences, shaping consumers' judgments of fairness and functional value. These elements are integrated into perceived value, which serves as the primary mechanism linking consumer experiences and market information to purchase intention.

These findings contribute to marketing theory by highlighting the experiential and interpretive nature of purchase intention formation and underscore the importance for modern retailers to prioritize relationship quality, consistent brand meaning, and value-based strategies in sustaining consumer purchase intentions within diverse and competitive market contexts such as Sumatra.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LH contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. MK contributed to supervision, validation, development of the theoretical framework, and writing review and editing. TB contributed to data curation, visualization, project administration, and writing review and editing.

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