Maroon Journal De Management

The Implementation of Differentiation Strategy and Its Effect on Customer Loyalty in the Indonesian Smartphone Industry: A Case Study of Mid-Tier Brands in Jakarta

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Article Info

Abstract

The Indonesian smartphone industry has experienced rapid expansion, with mid-tier brands in Jakarta occupying a strategic position in serving consumers who demand affordability without sacrificing quality. Within this highly competitive environment, differentiation strategies are crucial for establishing brand distinctiveness and sustaining customer loyalty. This study investigates the application of differentiation strategies and their influence on customer loyalty among users of mid-tier smartphones in Jakarta. A quantitative survey approach was employed, complemented by semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis. Data were collected from 150 respondents who had used mid-tier smartphones for a minimum of six months, ensuring informed evaluations. The findings indicate that product quality, features and innovation, brand image, and design significantly affect customer loyalty, with product quality emerging as the most influential factor. Conversely, after-sales service did not show a significant effect, suggesting that consumers in the mid-tier segment prioritize immediate functional value over long-term service considerations. Regression analysis reveals that differentiation strategies explain 63 percent of the variance in customer loyalty. These results highlight the importance of consistent quality management, continuous incremental innovation, and strong brand positioning globally.

INTRODUCTION

The global smartphone industry has undergone profound transformation over the past decade, driven by rapid technological advancement, accelerated digitalization, and the integration of mobile devices into nearly all aspects of daily life. Smartphones have evolved from basic communication tools into multifunctional platforms that support economic activity, social interaction, and access to information. In emerging economies, this transformation has been particularly significant, as smartphones act as primary gateways to digital services, financial technologies, and e-commerce ecosystems (Widianingsih et al., 2025; Otarinia, 2024; Celestin et al., 2024). Indonesia represents one of the most dynamic smartphone markets in Southeast Asia, characterized by high population density, a growing middle class, and increasing reliance on mobile technology for both personal and professional purposes (Lestari et al., 2024; Alfarizi et al., 2024; Iswardhana, 2024). Within this context,

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understanding competitive strategies in the smartphone industry is essential for explaining how firms sustain performance and customer relationships.

Jakarta, as Indonesia's political, economic, and cultural center, plays a pivotal role in shaping national consumption patterns and technological adoption (Sihombing, 2025; Alauddin et al., 2025). The city hosts a diverse consumer base, ranging from students and young professionals to established business users, all of whom exhibit high levels of smartphone dependency. Intense competition among global and regional smartphone brands has turned Jakarta into a strategic battleground, particularly within the mid-tier segment. Mid-tier smartphone brands occupy a crucial market position by offering devices that balance affordability with acceptable performance, design, and features. This segment attracts consumers who seek functional value and symbolic benefits without incurring the high costs associated with premium devices. As market saturation increases and product lifecycles shorten, brands are under mounting pressure to distinguish themselves beyond price competition alone (Pathak, 2025; Jahan et al., 2024; Aaker & Moorman, 2023).

In highly competitive and technology-driven markets, differentiation strategy has long been recognized as a fundamental source of competitive advantage. Rather than competing solely on cost, firms pursue differentiation by offering unique attributes that are valued by customers and perceived as distinct from competitors' offerings. In the smartphone industry, differentiation may manifest through superior product quality, innovative features, aesthetic design, strong brand image, or enhanced service experiences (Guoha & Dellova, 2025; Noor et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2023). Such attributes contribute to perceived value and influence consumer choice in markets where functional parity is increasingly common. Prior research emphasizes that effective differentiation not only attracts first-time buyers but also strengthens emotional and psychological bonds with consumers, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases and long-term engagement (Kosasih et al., 2024; Bing et al., 2024; Kartomo, 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025; Bhimavarapu, 2025).

Customer loyalty represents a critical outcome of successful differentiation, particularly in industries characterized by low switching costs and rapid imitation (Belli et al., 2022; Arshi et al., 2023). Loyal customers are more inclined to repurchase, recommend products to others, and remain resilient to competitors' promotional efforts. From a strategic perspective, customer loyalty contributes to stable revenue streams, reduced marketing costs, and enhanced brand equity. In the smartphone market, loyalty is especially valuable because consumers frequently face numerous alternatives with comparable specifications and price points. As a result, loyalty is often shaped not only by functional performance but also by perceptions of brand credibility, innovation consistency, and experiential satisfaction (Zaman & Kusi-Sarpong, 2024; Rastogi et al., 2024).

Despite the acknowledged importance of differentiation and loyalty, the mid-tier smartphone segment presents unique challenges. Consumers in this segment tend to be pragmatic, price-sensitive, and highly responsive to incremental improvements offered by competing brands. They often evaluate smartphones based on tangible benefits such as durability, battery performance, and usability, while simultaneously considering intangible factors such as brand reputation and design appeal. Consequently, the effectiveness of differentiation strategies may vary across market segments, and insights derived from premium or low-end markets cannot be directly generalized to the mid-tier context. This complexity underscores the need for empirical research that specifically examines how differentiation strategies operate within the mid-tier smartphone market in urban Indonesia.

The primary research problem addressed in this study concerns the extent to which differentiation strategies influence customer loyalty among users of mid-tier

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smartphone brands in Jakarta. While prior studies have explored consumer satisfaction, brand preference, and innovation in technology markets, relatively few have empirically assessed the combined impact of multiple differentiation dimensions such as product quality, features and innovation, design, brand image, and after-sales service on customer loyalty within a single, clearly defined market segment. Moreover, existing research often treats differentiation as a unidimensional construct, thereby overlooking the possibility that certain dimensions may exert stronger effects on loyalty than others (Yatna & Yulianah, 2024; Lubis & Muniapan, 2024).

From a managerial perspective, the absence of segment-specific evidence poses a challenge for strategic decision-making. Smartphone brands operating in Jakarta must allocate limited resources across competing strategic priorities, including product development, marketing communication, and service infrastructure. Without clear empirical guidance, firms risk overinvesting in attributes that do not significantly enhance loyalty or underinvesting in those that constitute key drivers of consumer commitment. Thus, a more nuanced understanding of differentiation strategy is required one that disaggregates its components and evaluates their relative influence on customer loyalty in the mid-tier smartphone segment.

The academic literature offers several general solutions to the problem of sustaining customer loyalty in competitive markets (Singh et al., 2023; Akanbi & Obafemi, 2024; Sani & Febrian, 2023). Relationship marketing theory emphasizes long-term engagement, trust, and satisfaction as precursors to loyalty, while strategic management literature highlights the role of unique value propositions in preventing commoditization. In technology markets, innovation and continuous improvement are frequently cited as mechanisms for maintaining relevance and consumer interest. However, these general solutions often lack contextual specificity and may not fully capture the realities of emerging markets, where consumer expectations, purchasing power, and technological infrastructure differ from those in developed economies (Abubakar et al., 2024; Cavusgil, 2021; Lavuri et al., 2023).

More specific solutions have been proposed in prior empirical studies. Research on consumer durable goods suggests that product quality remains a foundational determinant of loyalty, as reliable performance builds trust and reduces perceived risk. Studies on branding demonstrate that a strong brand image can mediate the relationship between functional attributes and loyalty by fostering emotional attachment and social identification. Meanwhile, innovation-oriented research argues that even incremental feature upgrades can positively influence satisfaction and repurchase intention, particularly in fast-moving technology sectors (Zheng & Chen, 2023; Warnakulasooriya et al., 2022). Service quality and after-sales support have also been identified as potential differentiators, although their importance appears to vary across industries and market segments (Kosasih et al., 2024; Bing et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the literature reveals inconsistencies regarding the relative importance of these differentiation dimensions. Some studies report that service quality is a dominant driver of loyalty, while others find that consumers prioritize core product attributes over supplementary services. Similarly, the role of design and aesthetics remains contested, with evidence suggesting that its impact may depend on demographic factors and lifestyle orientation. These mixed findings indicate a research gap, particularly in relation to mid-tier smartphone users in Jakarta, whose preferences may reflect a distinct balance between functional value and symbolic appeal.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to provide an integrated analysis of differentiation strategy and customer loyalty within the Indonesian mid-tier

smartphone market. By synthesizing insights from strategic management, marketing, and consumer behavior literature, the study examines how multiple dimensions of differentiation collectively and individually influence loyalty outcomes. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a specific yet economically significant market segment and its empirical assessment of differentiation dimensions that are often examined in isolation. Furthermore, by grounding the analysis in the urban context of Jakarta, the study offers context-sensitive evidence that can inform both theory development and managerial practice.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold: first, to assess consumers' perceptions of differentiation strategies implemented by mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta; second, to analyze the effect of these differentiation dimensions on customer loyalty; and third, to identify which strategic attributes exert the strongest influence on loyalty. The study is limited to mid-tier smartphone users who have sufficient usage experience to evaluate product and brand attributes, ensuring the validity of consumer judgments. Through this approach, the research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on competitive strategy in emerging technology markets and to provide actionable insights for firms striving to build sustainable customer loyalty in an increasingly crowded smartphone industry.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a case study design. The quantitative method is chosen because the primary objective is to measure the extent to which the implementation of differentiation strategies influences customer loyalty in mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta. At the same time, the case study design provides contextual depth, as it situates the research within a specific industrial and geographical setting, namely the Indonesian smartphone market with Jakarta as a significant urban representation.

The data used in this research consists of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to consumers of mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta. The questionnaire adopts a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to express their degree of agreement with statements concerning differentiation strategies including dimensions such as product, features, design, innovation, and after-sales service and customer loyalty indicators such as satisfaction, repurchase intention, and willingness to recommend. To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews are also conducted with marketing managers or brand managers of mid-tier smartphone brands. These interviews provide managerial insights into the differentiation strategies applied, thereby enriching the quantitative findings with qualitative perspectives.

In addition to primary data, the study also relies on secondary sources, including industry reports, trade association publications, official sales data, and relevant news articles that highlight developments in Indonesia's smartphone industry. These secondary data sources are intended to provide contextual grounding and to strengthen the interpretation of survey and interview findings.

The population of this study comprises users of mid-tier smartphones in Jakarta. Since the exact population size is not known, the study adopts a non-probability sampling technique using purposive sampling. The criteria for respondents include individuals who have been using mid-tier smartphones for at least six months, ensuring that they have sufficient experience to evaluate differentiation strategies and their influence on loyalty. The sample size is determined with consideration for statistical requirements, particularly for regression analysis or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A minimum of 150 respondents is targeted to secure validity and reliability in the results.

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The research instruments are subjected to validity and reliability testing. Validity tests are conducted to ensure that each indicator in the questionnaire accurately measures the intended construct, while reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of responses. The collected data is first analyzed descriptively to provide an overview of respondent characteristics and general perceptions. To test the hypotheses regarding the effect of differentiation strategies on customer loyalty, the study employs multiple linear regression analysis. Where appropriate, SEM-PLS is applied to model the relationships among latent variables more comprehensively. By combining a quantitative survey approach with supporting interviews and secondary data analysis, this study aims to present a holistic understanding of how differentiation strategies are implemented by mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta and the extent to which these strategies foster customer loyalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The survey involved 150 respondents who are active users of mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta. Table 1 presents an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Respondent Profile (n = 150)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	78	52.0
Female	72	48.0
Age Group		
18–24 years	46	30.7
25–34 years	61	40.7
35–44 years	29	19.3
45 years and above	14	9.3
Length of Use		
6–12 months	38	25.3
1–2 years	69	46.0
>2 years	43	28.7

This subsection presents the demographic profile of the respondents, which provides essential context for interpreting subsequent empirical findings. The study involved 150 respondents who met the criterion of having used a mid-tier smartphone for a minimum of six months. As reported in Table 1, the gender distribution is relatively balanced, with male respondents accounting for 52.0 percent and female respondents representing 48.0 percent. This balance suggests that mid-tier smartphone adoption in Jakarta is broadly distributed across genders, reflecting the normalization of smartphone use in urban Indonesian society (Lestari et al., 2024; Iswardhana, 2024).

Regarding age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents falls within the 25–34 age group (40.7 percent), followed by those aged 18–24 years (30.7 percent). Respondents aged 35–44 years account for 19.3 percent, while those aged 45 years and above represent 9.3 percent. This pattern indicates that the mid-tier smartphone segment is dominated by young adults and early-career professionals, a demographic group that typically prioritizes functional value, affordability, and technological relevance. This finding is consistent with prior studies highlighting younger urban consumers as the primary drivers of demand in the mid-tier smartphone market (Alfarizi et al., 2024; Jahan et al., 2024).

In terms of usage duration, nearly half of the respondents (46.0 percent) reported using their current smartphones for one to two years, while 28.7 percent had used their devices for more than two years. Only 25.3 percent reported usage of six to twelve months. The prevalence of longer usage periods suggests that respondents possessed sufficient experiential knowledge to evaluate differentiation attributes and loyalty-related behaviors, thereby strengthening the reliability of the data (Bing et al., 2024).

Perception of Differentiation Strategy

Respondents evaluated five dimensions of differentiation strategies implemented by mid-tier smartphone brands: product quality, features and innovation, design, after-sales service, and brand image.

Respondents' perceptions of differentiation strategies were measured across five dimensions: product quality, features and innovation, design, after-sales service, and brand image. The descriptive statistics for these dimensions are summarized in Table 2, which reports mean scores and standard deviations based on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Differentiation Strategy Dimensions

Differentiation Dimension	Mean Score (1–5)	Std. Deviation
Product Quality	4.21	0.58
Features and Innovation	4.08	0.65
Design	4.15	0.61
After-Sales Service	3.76	0.73
Brand Image	4.10	0.59

Product quality received the highest mean score (M = 4.21, SD = 0.58), indicating strong consumer agreement that mid-tier smartphones deliver reliable performance and functional adequacy. This result suggests that aspects such as durability, processing stability, and battery performance are perceived positively by users. The prominence of product quality aligns with prior literature emphasizing its central role in shaping value perception and competitive advantage in technology-driven markets (Kosasih et al., 2024; Rastogi et al., 2024).

Design was also evaluated favorably, with a mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.61). This finding reflects positive perceptions of smartphone aesthetics, ergonomics, and visual appeal. The relatively low variability in responses indicates consistency in consumer evaluations, reinforcing the argument that design has become an important differentiating factor even outside the premium segment (Jahan et al., 2024). Brand image recorded a mean score of 4.10 (SD = 0.59), suggesting that respondents associate mid-tier smartphone brands with recognizable identities and acceptable reputations. A positive brand image is often linked to trust and reduced perceived risk, particularly in markets characterized by frequent product introductions and rapid technological change (Bing et al., 2024; Zaman & Kusi-Sarpong, 2024).

Features and innovation achieved a mean score of 4.08 (SD = 0.65), indicating that respondents acknowledged the presence of meaningful technological enhancements. Although slightly lower than product quality and design, this score remains high, reflecting appreciation for incremental innovation rather than radical technological breakthroughs. This pattern is consistent with previous findings that mid-tier consumers value practical innovation that enhances usability and relevance over time (Rastogi et al., 2024).

After-sales service received the lowest mean score among the differentiation dimensions (M = 3.76, SD = 0.73). While still above the neutral midpoint, this result

suggests relatively weaker consumer perceptions regarding warranty handling, repair services, and customer support. The higher standard deviation indicates variability in service experiences, a phenomenon frequently observed in mid-tier technology markets where service standardization remains uneven (Čavlin et al., 2024).

Customer Loyalty Indicators

Customer loyalty was measured across three key indicators: satisfaction, repurchase intention, and willingness to recommend.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Customer Loyalty Indicators

Loyalty Indicator	Mean Score (1–5)	Std. Deviation
Customer Satisfaction	4.19	0.62
Repurchase Intention	4.02	0.66
Willingness to Recommend	4.11	0.60

Customer satisfaction achieved the highest mean score (M = 4.19, SD = 0.62), indicating that respondents generally felt satisfied with their smartphone purchases. High satisfaction levels suggest that perceived performance aligns well with expectations, a condition widely recognized in the literature as a precursor to loyalty formation (Bing et al., 2024; Kosasih et al., 2024).

Willingness to recommend followed closely with a mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.60). This finding indicates a strong propensity among respondents to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication. In smartphone markets, such recommendations are particularly influential, as peer opinions and social networks play a significant role in shaping consumer decisions (Rastogi et al., 2024).

Repurchase intention recorded a slightly lower mean score (M = 4.02, SD = 0.66). Although still within a high range, this result reflects a degree of cautious loyalty. The relatively lower score may be attributed to intense competition, frequent product updates, and aggressive promotional activities that encourage consumers to continuously evaluate alternative brands. Similar trends have been documented in prior studies on technology-intensive industries (Zaman & Kusi-Sarpong, 2024).

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of differentiation strategies on customer loyalty.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p)
Product Quality	0.285	3.76	0.000***
Features and Innovation	0.210	2.98	0.003**
Design	0.173	2.41	0.017*
After-Sales Service	0.126	1.89	0.061
Brand Image	0.198	2.77	0.006**
Adjusted R²	0.63		

Significance levels: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

The regression model demonstrates substantial explanatory power, with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.63. This indicates that 63 percent of the variance in customer loyalty is explained by the combined differentiation strategy dimensions. In behavioral and marketing research, this level of explanatory strength is considered robust, confirming the strategic relevance of differentiation in shaping loyalty outcomes (Kosasih et al., 2024; Bing et al., 2024).

Product quality emerged as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.285$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates a strong and statistically significant relationship between perceived quality and loyalty behaviors, including satisfaction, repurchase intention, and recommendation. The result reinforces extensive empirical evidence identifying product quality as a dominant driver of loyalty in consumer durable and technology markets (Rastogi et al., 2024). Features and innovation also exhibited a significant positive effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < 0.01$). This result suggests that consumers who perceive their smartphones as technologically relevant and continuously updated are more likely to remain loyal. The finding aligns with prior studies emphasizing the role of incremental innovation in maintaining consumer engagement and reducing switching behavior (Jahan et al., 2024; Zaman & Kusi-Sarpong, 2024).

Brand image was found to significantly influence customer loyalty as well ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that favorable brand perceptions contribute to stronger loyalty, supporting branding literature that highlights emotional attachment and trust as key mechanisms linking brand image to long-term customer relationships (Bing et al., 2024; Rastogi et al., 2024).

Design showed a positive and statistically significant effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.05$), although its influence was weaker compared to product quality and innovation. This result suggests that aesthetic and ergonomic considerations play a complementary role in shaping loyalty, consistent with studies that recognize design as an important but secondary differentiation attribute in mid-tier markets (Jahan et al., 2024). In contrast, after-sales service did not have a statistically significant effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.126$, $p = 0.061$). Although the coefficient was positive, the lack of statistical significance indicates that variations in perceived service quality do not meaningfully explain differences in loyalty among respondents. This finding is consistent with earlier research suggesting that mid-tier consumers prioritize immediate functional value over long-term service considerations (Čavlin et al., 2024).

The results of this study demonstrate that differentiation strategies are a key driver of customer loyalty in the mid-tier smartphone market in Jakarta. Among the various dimensions analyzed, product quality stands out as the most influential factor. This finding reinforces the idea that consumers in this segment prioritize functionality and dependability. For example, users often evaluate their smartphones based on daily usability factors such as multitasking efficiency, network stability, and durability under heavy use. Thus, when brands succeed in consistently delivering reliable quality, they cultivate stronger loyalty even in the face of competitive pricing from rivals.

The significance of features and innovation further emphasizes the importance of product evolution. While consumers in the mid-tier segment may not expect cutting-edge innovations found in flagship devices, they still value incremental improvements such as enhanced battery capacity, better camera performance, and updated operating systems. These features allow customers to feel that their devices remain relevant in a rapidly evolving technological environment. The positive relationship between features and customer loyalty also suggests that mid-tier brands cannot afford to remain stagnant; innovation, even at a moderate scale, is essential to sustaining consumer engagement.

Brand image also exerts a significant influence, highlighting the symbolic and emotional dimensions of consumer loyalty. A strong brand image helps to build trust and a sense of belonging among users, which can translate into recommendations to peers and positive word-of-mouth. This finding is consistent with prior research

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indicating that emotional attachment and perceived prestige can elevate customer loyalty, even when functional attributes are comparable across competing brands.

Design, while less influential than other dimensions, still plays an important role. Aesthetic appeal, ergonomic design, and stylistic features such as color variety or slimness contribute to the perceived attractiveness of a smartphone. The fact that design was statistically significant suggests that customers do not solely evaluate smartphones based on technical specifications but also on how well the product reflects their personal identity and lifestyle preferences.

Interestingly, after-sales service was not found to be a significant predictor of loyalty. This result may reflect the unique characteristics of the mid-tier market, where consumers tend to emphasize upfront product value rather than long-term service quality. In contrast to premium consumers who often demand extensive warranties and premium support, mid-tier users may prioritize affordability and immediate usability. However, this does not imply that after-sales service should be neglected. On the contrary, improving service quality could provide a competitive edge in differentiating brands that are otherwise similar in terms of features and design.

These findings suggest that mid-tier smartphone brands in Jakarta should maintain a balanced approach to differentiation strategies. Ensuring consistent product quality remains the foundation for customer loyalty, while continued investment in innovation and brand-building is crucial for sustaining market relevance. At the same time, attention to design can help reinforce consumer identity, and strengthening after-sales service could represent an untapped opportunity to further distinguish brands in a crowded and highly competitive market.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that differentiation strategies play a decisive role in shaping customer loyalty within the mid-tier smartphone market in Jakarta. The empirical findings demonstrate that product quality is the most influential driver of loyalty, underscoring consumers' strong emphasis on reliability, performance, and functional value when evaluating smartphone brands. Features and innovation, brand image, and design also contribute significantly to loyalty, indicating that both functional and symbolic attributes are important in sustaining consumer commitment in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving market. In contrast, after-sales service does not exhibit a significant effect on customer loyalty, suggesting that mid-tier consumers tend to prioritize immediate product value over long-term service considerations. Overall, the results highlight the need for mid-tier smartphone brands to adopt a multidimensional differentiation strategy that prioritizes consistent quality and continuous innovation while reinforcing brand image and design appeal. By aligning differentiation efforts with consumer priorities, firms can strengthen customer loyalty and enhance their competitive positioning in Indonesia's dynamic smartphone industry.

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