

## The effect of brand trust on purchase intention mediated by brand preferences among generation Z consumers of healthy food products at Fit Fuel Restaurant



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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, with brand preference serving as a mediating variable among Generation Z consumers of healthy food products at Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar in Bandung. A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 165 Generation Z respondents who were familiar with and interested in healthy food products. The proposed relationships were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4. The findings indicate that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on both brand preference and purchase intention. In addition, brand preference positively and significantly influences purchase intention and serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention. These findings highlight the pivotal role of brand preference as a psychological mechanism through which consumer trust translates into stronger purchase intentions. This study contributes to the branding and consumer behavior literature by providing empirical evidence on the mediating role of brand preference in the healthy food sector. The findings also offer practical implications for marketers by emphasizing the importance of building consumer trust through consistent product quality, transparent communication, and positive customer experiences to strengthen brand preference and stimulate purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.*

**Keywords:** Brand Trust; Brand Preferences; Purchase Intention; Healthy Food; Generation Z



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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the consumption patterns of Indonesian society have undergone significant changes, shifting from traditional diets based on local ingredients toward modern eating habits that are generally high in calories, sugar, and saturated fats (Popkin, 2017). This phenomenon is known as the nutrition transition and has directly contributed to the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health's Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) (2018; 2023) indicate that the consumption of fast food and sugary beverages among adolescents and adults has increased significantly over the last five years, in line with the rise in obesity prevalence from 31% in 2018 to 36.8% in 2023.

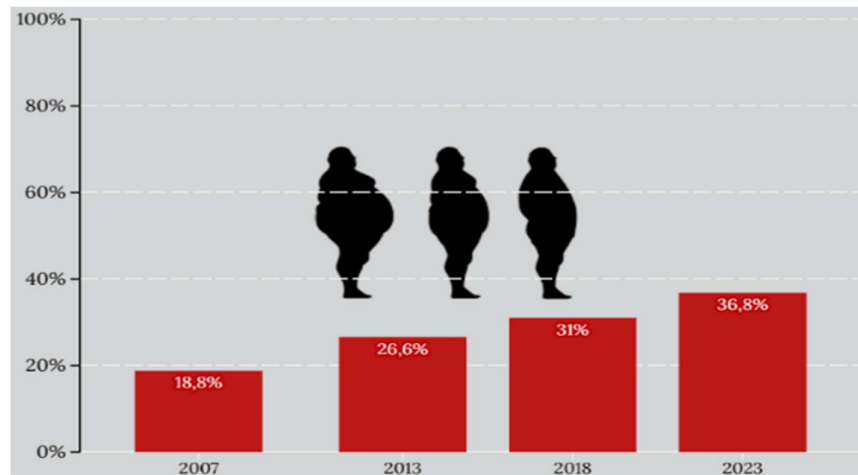
**Table 1**  
**Retail Sale of Indonesia Foodservice by Subsector**

| Category                    | 2019            | 2023            | CAGR* (%) 2019-2023 | 2024            | 2028            | CAGR* (%) 2023-2028 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>38,533.4</b> | <b>30,172.1</b> | <b>-5.9</b>         | <b>35,860.1</b> | <b>48,533.6</b> | <b>1.8</b>          |
| Full-Service Restaurants    | 31,739.5        | 23,937.2        | -6.8                | 28,756.9        | 39,017.6        | 7.9                 |
| Limited-Service Restaurants | 2,376.8         | 2,574.8         | 2.0                 | 2,873.9         | 3,659.6         | 6.2                 |
| Cafés/Bars                  | 2,653.2         | 2,093.5         | -5.8                | 2,388.4         | 3,375.4         | 9.0                 |
| Street Stalls/Kiosks        | 1,565.5         | 1,453.1         | -1.8                | 1,723.2         | 2,349.4         | 8.1                 |
| Self-Service Cafeterias     | 198.4           | 113.5           | -13.0               | 117.7           | 131.6           | 2.8                 |

Source: Euromonitor International Report, 2026

The trend of fast-food consumption in Indonesia continues to increase. According to a report by Euromonitor International (2023), Indonesia has become one of the fastest-growing fast-food markets in Southeast Asia. This growth is driven by practical lifestyles, relatively affordable prices, and the extensive penetration of major fast-food brands that are accessible to nearly all segments of society. Riskesdas (2018) also reported that more than 30% of Indonesian adolescents consume fast food more than once a week. This condition indicates an increasing risk of health problems, particularly among younger age groups who are developing long-term lifestyle habits.

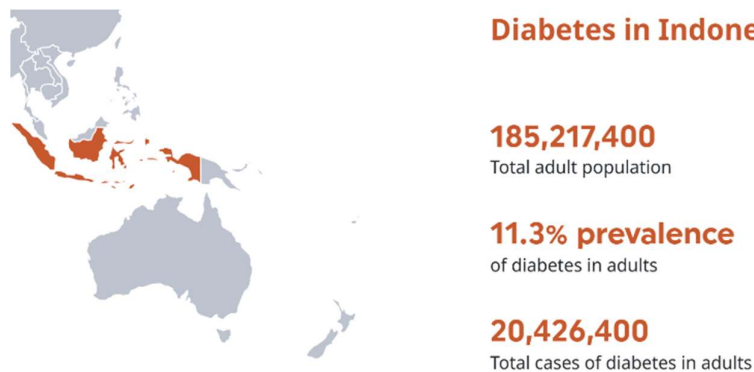
Fast food generally contains high levels of calories but low amounts of fiber and protein, making it easy to consume excessively and thereby increasing the risk of obesity (globally estimated at an additional 500 kcal/day and weight gain of approximately 0.45 kg/week) (Ultra-processed foods, Wikipedia, 2023). The Indonesian Ministry of Health (2020) reported that obesity prevalence among the adult population in Indonesia increased from 31% in 2018 to 36.8% in 2023.



Source: Kementerian Kesehatan RI, 2023

**Figure 1**  
**Prevalence of obesity in Indonesia**

Excessive consumption of fast food or ultra-processed foods is also associated with an increased prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus. This finding is consistent with a recent meta-analysis conducted by Chen et al. (2023) involving 415,554 participants, which found that every 10% increase in ultra-processed food consumption was associated with a 12% increase in the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. These findings confirm that high levels of fast-food consumption not only contribute to excess body weight but also increase the likelihood of long-term metabolic disorders, including diabetes mellitus. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) reported in 2024 that the number of people living with diabetes in Indonesia reached 20.4 million, placing Indonesia as the country with the fifth-largest diabetic population in the world.

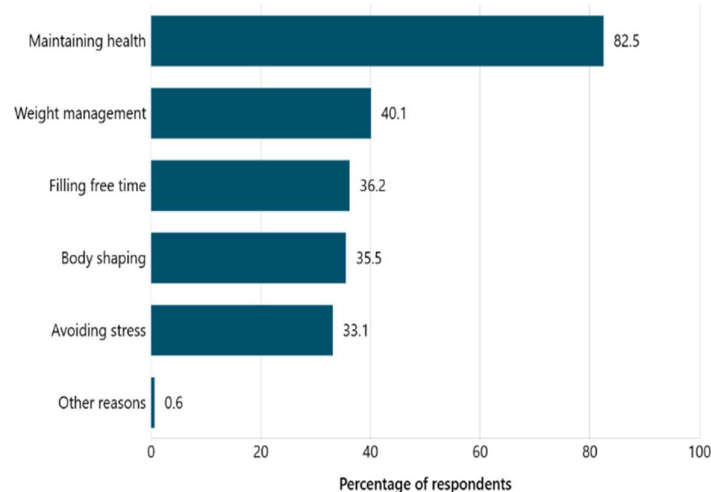


Source: International Diabetes Federation Report, 2024

**Figure 2**  
**Diabetes in Indonesia**

Although fast-food consumption remains high and negatively affects health, a positive trend has also become increasingly evident in Indonesia. According to the “New Year, New Me” survey (Herbalife Asia Pacific, 2024), 89% of Indonesian consumers

consider healthy eating important for supporting both physical and mental health, while 95% plan to adopt a healthier lifestyle in the following year. In addition, a NielsenIQ report (2025) noted that 46% of Indonesians proactively take actions to maintain their health, such as exercising regularly, monitoring health indicators, and making more conscious consumption choices.



Source: Katadata Insight Center, 2023

**Figure 3**  
**Curious Survey Results**

The healthy food industry in Indonesia demonstrates highly promising growth prospects, with the segment growing by an average of 8–10% annually over the last five years, driven by increasing consumer awareness regarding balanced diets and disease prevention. A NielsenIQ report (2022) confirmed that more than 65% of Indonesian consumers actively seek products with “healthier” claims, such as low sugar, low calorie, and natural ingredients, indicating a more mature market for both local and international healthy food brands. Within this context, Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar in Bandung has emerged as a relevant local business, with a high online rating (4.8/5 from more than 660 reviews) and a strong position among young consumers. Nevertheless, despite growing awareness of healthy living, a gap remains between such awareness and actual purchasing behavior. Many Generation Z consumers continue to choose fast food due to factors such as price, accessibility, and consumption habits, while repeat purchase behavior toward healthy food products remains fluctuating and has not yet demonstrated a stable trend.

The selection of a restaurant as the research object was based on thorough academic considerations, given that food products consumed through restaurants fall into the category of high-involvement products, requiring consumers to directly experience aspects such as taste quality, cleanliness, service quality, and dining atmosphere. In the context of healthy food, perceived consumer risk becomes even higher because it is directly associated with health, food safety, and nutritional value, making brand trust a highly influential factor. Restaurants enable the formation of a more comprehensive brand experience through consumers’ sensory, emotional, and behavioral interactions, all of which play important roles in shaping brand preference and purchase intention. Fit Fuel was specifically selected because of its strong relevance

to Generation Z consumers in Bandung, offering healthy menu items such as salad wraps and smoothies through an aesthetically appealing approach and strong branding, along with a significant digital presence and a ranking of 35th among the “50 Best Spots for Salad in Bandung,” achieving a score of 4.4/5 based on 213 reviews on the Wanderlog platform.

Generation Z was selected as the research subject because individuals born between 1997 and 2012 are recognized as digital natives who are highly accustomed to technology and social media. They demonstrate a strong tendency to follow trends and rely heavily on digital media when making decisions, including food consumption choices. More than 50% of Generation Z consumers in Indonesia express an interest in consuming healthy food as part of their lifestyle; however, their purchasing behavior is often inconsistent due to factors such as price, habits, and social influence. This creates challenges for healthy food businesses in building consumer trust and preference in order to generate purchase intention and ultimately influence actual purchase decisions. Brand trust becomes a crucial factor because consumers within the healthy food industry rely heavily on safety, nutritional value, and ingredient quality, while Generation Z consumers tend to switch brands easily due to competitor promotions, seasonal menu offerings, or viral content. This indicates that brand preference has not yet become firmly established and highlights the need to understand the psychological factors that drive purchase intention.

This study focuses on measuring brand trust among Generation Z consumers who have tried Fit Fuel products at least once, ensuring that the trust being measured reflects genuine evaluations of brand performance based on actual consumption experiences rather than perceptions formed solely through indirect information. Based on both theoretical and empirical evidence, brand trust positively influences brand preference, which subsequently becomes an important factor in predicting purchase intention. In this relationship, brand preference serves as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of brand trust on purchase intention.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of brand trust on purchase intention mediated by brand preference toward healthy food products among Generation Z consumers at Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the development of more effective marketing strategies for building brand trust and brand preference within the increasingly competitive healthy food industry.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH FRAMEWORK, AND HYPOTHESES**

### **Brand Trust**

Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence that a brand is capable of fulfilling the promises it communicates. This study adopts the definitions proposed by Zhang et al. (2023), which emphasize the rational aspect of brand trust (the brand's ability to meet expectations and influence purchasing decisions), and Gong et al. (2023), who highlight its emotional and relational aspects (mutual confidence that fosters loyalty and sustained purchase intention).

This study adopts the dimensions of brand trust from Kabadayi and Alan (2012) and Mosavi and Kenarehfar (2013), consisting of:

1. Reliability: The belief that a brand delivers consistent and dependable performance.
2. Intentionality (Benevolence): The perception that a brand cares about consumers and will not act against their interests.
3. Competence: The brand's ability to satisfy consumers' needs and expectations.

4. Integrity: The honesty and transparency of a brand in fulfilling its promises.

### **Brand Preferences**

Brand preference refers to an individual's tendency to choose a particular brand over competing alternatives. This study adopts the definition proposed by Ligaraba et al. (2024), which emphasizes the relationship between consumers' preference for a brand and purchase intention as a key predictor of purchasing behavior. This study adopts the dimensions of brand preference from Dam (2020), consisting of:

1. Brand liking: The degree of consumers' affection or favorable attitude toward a brand (affective dimension).
2. Brand choice: Consumers tendency to select a particular brand among available alternatives (cognitive dimension).
3. Repeat preference: The desire to continue choosing and purchasing the same brand repeatedly in the future (behavioral dimension).

### **Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention refers to an individual's level of willingness and readiness to purchase a product or service. This study adopts the definitions proposed by Khan et al. (2023), which emphasize the cognitive-evaluative aspect (product assessment), and Wijaya and Keni (2022), which highlight the affective-behavioral aspect (the influence of promotions and experiences in encouraging actual purchasing behavior). This study adopts the dimensions of purchase intention from Wijaya and Keni (2022) and Choi et al. (2020), consisting of:

1. Information seeking: The tendency to seek further information about a product.
2. Consideration: The extent to which a product is considered as a potential choice among alternatives.
3. Future intention: The intention to purchase the product in the future.
4. Certainty to buy: The level of confidence in actually making the purchase.

### **METHOD**

This study employs a conclusive research design with a quantitative approach through the survey method to examine the causal relationships between variables, appropriate given that the required information is clearly defined and the data are adequate for statistical analysis (Malhotra et al., 2017; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Being verificative in nature, the study tests the effect of brand trust on brand preference, the effect of brand preference on purchase intention, and the mediating role of brand preference in this relationship, applying a causal-predictive approach through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as recommended by Hair et al. (2021). The population consists of Generation Z in Bandung City who have purchased or are familiar with Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar or healthy food products in general (Malhotra et al., 2017), with an estimated population of approximately 671,298 individuals based on Bandung City Statistics (BPS, 2023).

The sample was determined using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling with judgment sampling (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), based on the following criteria: aged 18–26 years, residing in Bandung City, having purchased or being familiar with Fit Fuel, and having an interest in healthy food products. The minimum sample size followed the guidelines of Hair et al. (2014, 2019) for PLS-SEM, namely five times the number of indicators (33 indicators  $\times$  5 = 165 respondents), and this study used 200 respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire

using a 1–5 Likert scale, distributed online and self-administered via Google Forms, given that Generation Z respondents are highly familiar with digital media (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). All questionnaire items were adapted from indicators previously validated for validity and reliability in earlier studies, so no pilot test was conducted.

The collected data were analyzed in two stages: descriptive analysis to describe respondent characteristics and research variables, and verificative analysis to test the relationships between variables and the research hypotheses, following the guidelines of Malhotra et al. (2017), Sekaran & Bougie (2016), and Hair et al. (2021). The verificative analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS 4.0 software, chosen for its ability to simultaneously evaluate the measurement and structural models, including tests of convergent and discriminant validity, construct reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha), path coefficients, R-square values, and both direct and indirect effects through the bootstrapping technique (Hair et al., 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was distributed online to 180 respondents; however, only 172 respondents met the criteria (residing in the city of Bandung, belonging to Generation Z, having an interest in healthy food, and having purchased a healthy food product at least once) and were therefore used in the data analysis. The majority of respondents were aged 20–22 years (71%) and were students (74%), reflecting a Generation Z cohort at the early-adulthood stage that is beginning to make independent consumption decisions. Most respondents became aware of Fit Fuel through Instagram (85%), indicating the dominant role of social media in shaping brand awareness within this age group (We Are Social, 2024).

In terms of motivation, the majority of respondents purchased products at Fit Fuel to follow a diet program (50%) and to maintain a healthy lifestyle (40%), with the main reasons for choosing the brand being healthy/nutritious content (38%) and product taste (30%). These findings confirm that purchasing decisions for healthy food products are driven by functional and health-related considerations rather than mere trend, making brand trust an important factor in convincing consumers that the product's health claims are genuinely fulfilled (NielsenIQ, 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2021).

Descriptive analysis was conducted on respondents' responses regarding the variables of brand trust (four dimensions: reliability, benevolence, competence, integrity), brand preference (three dimensions: brand liking, brand choice, repeat preference), and purchase intention (four dimensions: information seeking, consideration, future intention, certainty to buy). Overall, respondents' responses to all three variables fell into the high category, indicating that Generation Z consumers regard Fit Fuel as fairly trustworthy and likeable, and as having the potential to drive repeat purchase intention.

Evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) showed that all items across the three variables had loading factor values above 0.70 (ranging from 0.717–0.896), and were therefore declared valid (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was further supported by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values that all exceeded the 0.50 threshold, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**AVE Values and Construct Reliability**

| Variable                | AVE   | Composite Reliability | Cronbach's Alpha | Remarks          |
|-------------------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Brand Trust (BT)        | 0.647 | 0.879                 | 0.845            | Valid & Reliable |
| Brand Preference (BP)   | 0.583 | 0.919                 | 0.904            | Valid & Reliable |
| Purchase Intention (PI) | 0.695 | 0.935                 | 0.924            | Valid & Reliable |

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 data processing results, 2026

The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all three constructs were above 0.70, indicating good internal consistency of the indicators (Hair et al., 2019). The discriminant validity test through cross loading also confirmed that each indicator had its highest loading on its own construct, indicating no overlap between constructs. In the structural model (inner model), the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all constructs were below 3, indicating no collinearity issues among the predictor variables. The R-square value shows that brand trust explains 47.1% of the variance in brand preference, while brand trust and brand preference together explain 64.6% of the variance in purchase intention indicating a moderate-to-strong model strength (Hair et al., 2019).

### Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS 4.0, with a relationship considered significant if the p-value < 0.05. The results of the four hypothesis tests are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Hypothesis Test Results**

| Hypothesis | Path                                                | Coefficient<br>(Original Sample) | P-Values | Result   |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| H1         | Brand Trust → Brand Preference                      | 0.646                            | 0.000    | Accepted |
| H2         | Brand Trust → Purchase Intention                    | 0.533                            | 0.000    | Accepted |
| H3         | Brand Preference → Purchase Intention               | 0.348                            | 0.000    | Accepted |
| H4         | Brand Trust → Brand Preference → Purchase Intention | 0.225                            | 0.000    | Accepted |

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 data processing results, 2026

The first hypothesis (H1) was accepted: brand trust has a positive and significant effect on brand preference (coefficient 0.646; p = 0.000), consistent with the findings of Rather et al. (2019) and Cuong (2020) that consumer trust is a key determinant of brand preference. The second hypothesis (H2) was accepted: brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (coefficient 0.533; p = 0.000), consistent with Mosavi & Kenarehfar (2013) and Chinomona (2016), as trust reduces the perceived risk in purchase decision-making.

The third hypothesis (H3) was accepted: brand preference has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (coefficient 0.348; p = 0.000), consistent with Hellier et al. (2003) and Buil et al. (2013), where strong preference simplifies the consumer decision-making process. The fourth hypothesis (H4) was accepted: brand

preference was proven to significantly mediate the effect of brand trust on purchase intention (indirect effect 0.225;  $p = 0.000$ ). Because both the direct path (0.533) and the indirect path (0.225) are significant and share the same positive direction, the type of mediation that occurs is complementary partial mediation (Hair et al., 2019) brand preference does not replace but rather strengthens the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, consistent with the findings of Kabadayi & Alan (2012) and Rather et al. (2019).

Overall, these results confirm that building strong brand trust, followed by strengthening brand preference, is an effective strategy for Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar to sustainably increase the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on both brand preferences and purchase intention, while brand preferences also have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers of healthy food products at Fit Fuel Salad & Smoothies Bar Bandung. The main finding of this study indicates that brand preferences mediate the effect of brand trust on purchase intention through a complementary partial mediation mechanism, in which brand preference strengthens the relationship between trust and purchase intention without eliminating the direct effect of brand trust.

These findings suggest that consumers' trust in a brand not only directly influences their purchase intention but also plays an important role in shaping brand preferences, which serve as a foundation for long-term purchasing decisions. For Fit Fuel, brand-strengthening strategies should focus on enhancing brand trust through consistent product quality, transparent information, and positive customer experiences, while simultaneously strengthening brand preferences through product differentiation, clear positioning, and effective marketing communication to sustainably encourage consumers' purchase intentions.

Future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables such as perceived value, brand image, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), or customer satisfaction to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing purchase intention among Generation Z consumers of healthy food products.

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