Jurnal Aplikasi Bisnis dan Manajemen (JABM), Vol. 12 No.3, September 2026
Permalink/DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17358/jabm.12.3.1109

Available online
http://journal.ipb.ac.id/index.php/jabm

ETHICAL SALESPERSON BEHAVIOUR, FIRM REPUTATION, B2B CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, AND LOYALTY IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

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Article history:

Received
6 November 2025

Revised
27 January 2026

Accepted
20 September 2026

Available online
30 September 2026

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Abstract:

Background: Ethical behaviour has become an important component of business strategy. Ethical salesperson behaviour and a favourable firm reputation may strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in business-to-business (B2B) relationships.
Purpose: This study examines the effects of ethical salesperson behaviour and firm reputation on B2B customer satisfaction and loyalty in the healthcare sector.
Design/methodology/approach: This study employed a quantitative approach using data collected from 305 B2B customers through purposive sampling and an online questionnaire. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to examine the relationships among ethical salesperson behaviour, firm reputation, satisfaction with the salesperson, satisfaction with the firm, and B2B customer loyalty. Mediation effects were assessed using the Sobel test.
Findings: Ethical salesperson behaviour had a strong positive effect on firm reputation but did not have a significant direct effect on B2B customer loyalty. Firm reputation had significant effects on satisfaction with the salesperson and customer loyalty, whereas its direct effect on satisfaction with the firm was not significant. Satisfaction with the firm significantly affected customer loyalty, whereas satisfaction with the salesperson did not. The reported mediation analysis indicates that firm reputation mediates the relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty.
Conclusion: The findings highlight the role of ethical salesperson behaviour in strengthening firm reputation and demonstrate the importance of firm-level relationships in fostering B2B customer loyalty.
Originality/value: This study contributes to the B2B relationship marketing literature by distinguishing between satisfaction with the salesperson and satisfaction with the firm and by examining the mediating role of firm reputation in the healthcare context.

Keywords: ethical salesperson behaviour, firm reputation, satisfaction, loyalty, B2B customers

How to Cite:
Abdillah, F., & Nurohyani, I. (2026). Ethical salesperson behaviour, firm reputation, B2B customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the healthcare sector. *Jurnal Aplikasi Bisnis dan Manajemen*, 12(3), 1109. https://doi.org/10.17358/jabm.12.3.1109

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INTRODUCTION

The health sector has received significant attention from the public since the global Covid-19 pandemic. The market consistently expects health-related products to be available, as this availability offers a sense of security for the public. According to previous research data, the growth of the local market in Indonesia for the pharmaceutical sector still presents substantial opportunities (Erlangga et al. 2020; Gonzalez, 2019). The government continues to support the development of the Indonesian health sector by increasing state funding (Statista Research Department, 2023). Although there are business opportunities, competition in the health products market continues to increase. This study uses PT. Beiersdorf Indonesia, a company focused on maintaining stability and ensuring equitable distribution of healthcare products across various market regions in Indonesia, to provide an overview of the B2B relationship between business consumers and companies in the health sector. Another reason the company was selected for this study is because sales growth in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor reveals significant disparities among these regions, with differences exceeding 300% during the 2021-2022 period (PT Beiersdorf Indonesia, 2023). Nationally, sales clusters in Indonesia are generally categorized into West, Central, and East Sales Areas, a classification used to determine customer management strategies based on business potential (Octa, 2019). The persistence of this sales growth gap is a critical issue that requires further investigation, particularly its impact on long-term relationships with B2B consumers, to ensure the healthcare company remains competitive. Previous findings have not examined satisfaction from the perspective of corporate customers (Suryani & Nurmala, 2024) and there still limited research has explored loyalty in the healthcare industry (Rinenggo et al. 2024).

A salesperson who demonstrates behaviour rooted in ethical values can foster strong B2B relationships, increase business customers' satisfaction, and increase their loyalty. Companies implement sales force programs specifically tailored to each product sales channel to facilitate product reach to end users (Palmatier et al. 2017). Salespersons are the face of the company and are responsible for relationships with suppliers, customers, and colleagues. They are crucial for successfully making sales and providing the best possible service to users (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014; Badrinarayanan et al. 2019; Demirgüneş, 2015; Lussier et al. 2025; Manalu, 2018). Ethical values must be recognised and implemented by marketers and salesperson (Ferrell et al. 2007; Hunt, 2019; Manning et al. 2016; Wijaya et al. 2022). One ethical salesperson's behaviour is to convey accurate information to buyers during transactions. The ethical skills of salesperson in providing accurate product information and consultation to address consumer concerns are crucial for sales performance (Maulana & Wijayanto, 2019) and maintaining long-term relationships between a company and its customers (Manning et al. 2016; Román, 2003). Ethical salesperson behaviour is crucial in the marketing sector because salespersons serve as an important promotional element (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Wotruba, 1990). Delivering products through ethical-based salesperson services will meet the expectations of business customers and enhance their satisfaction and loyalty.

A company's reputation plays a significant role in increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Reputation is a concept that has been widely studied by business researchers because it reflects a company's social identity, product quality, and pricing (Shapiro, 1983; Wilson, 1985). Marketing researchers interpret reputation in terms of brand equity and company credibility (Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013; Herbig et al. 1994) as well as intangible assets that significantly influence company performance (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Nguyen et al. 2013; Rao, 1994; Richard, 1993). Companies with a perceived superior reputation are more likely to gain acceptance among consumers, leading to increased sales. Customers tend to choose institutions with excellent reputations for their satisfaction, which significantly contributes to the development of customer loyalty (Hetze, 2016; Nguyen et al. 2013; Richard & Zhang, 2012; Saleh et al. 2017). A strong corporate reputation can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Caruana & Ewing, 2010; Islam et al. 2021). In a B2B context, customer satisfaction is divided into two parts: customer satisfaction with the company and satisfaction with the salesperson (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014). Customer satisfaction with the salesperson arises from B2B customers' experiences in receiving the expected outcomes when interacting with them (Agnihotri et al. 2017).

This study is based on two theories, namely relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and social exchange theory, to offer further insight into

relationship marketing and the formation of customer loyalty by highlighting factors such as employee competence (Hsiao et al. 2023), perceived value, and trust (Rinenggo et al. 2024). In B2B practice, developing and maintaining the long-term relationships emphasised by relationship marketing is essential for achieving sustainable business. Satisfaction is a strong factor in supporting relationship marketing (Ferro-Soto et al. 2025). The social exchange theory posits that individuals engage in relationships with the expectation of receiving satisfying rewards (Blau, 1968). This theory highlights the reciprocal nature of economic and social benefits in exchange relationships, particularly in business contexts (Lambe et al. 2001). Previous research has utilised social exchange theory to explain relationship marketing dynamics, demonstrating how partnerships evolve to foster B2B loyalty through effective communication, evaluation, and mutual benefits, while emphasising the crucial roles of trust (Rinenggo et al. 2024) and customer satisfaction (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014).

This study reveals the existence of high-quality relationships through the concept of relationship marketing and social exchange theory, wherein B2B interaction factors, specifically ethics-based salesperson behaviour and firm reputation, drive customer satisfaction and loyalty. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of ethical behaviour for sales professionals; however, ethical behaviour among salesperson across various industries remains under-researched (Anand et al. 2023; Ghoniyah, 2013; Lussier et al. 2019; Suhartanto, 2019; Wihartono, 2013; Wijaya et al. 2022), particularly its effect on B2B customer satisfaction and long-term relationships (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014; Dugan et al. 2020; Wijaya et al. 2022).

This research investigates customer satisfaction from the viewpoint of B2B relationships within the healthcare sector, which is different from prior studies that utilized a general B2B industry context. Although prior research has established the importance of the relationships among firm reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, empirical evidence examining the sequential mechanisms through which firm reputation shapes satisfaction and loyalty in B2B contexts remains relatively limited (Farhan et al. 2020; Keh & Xie, 2009; Miremadi et al. 2011; Otto et al. 2020; Shanka & Buvik, 2019). This study argues that B2B customer satisfaction needs to be comprehensively examined through two components (satisfaction with the seller and satisfaction with the firm) simultaneously forming long-term relationships with B2B customers. In existing literature on B2B interaction analysis, relationship quality is defined at two levels: interpersonal (relationship with the salesperson) and organizational (relationship with the company) (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014; Poujol et al. 2013). By exploring the effects of both types of satisfaction, this study will provide distinct insights. Therefore, it is important to put together a new measurement model for sales force ethical behaviour and satisfaction of B2B customers that is relevant and holistic in the case of the healthcare industry.

This study develops as a reference model for ethics-based salesperson behaviour from a relationship marketing perspective and social exchange theory in the healthcare industry. Furthermore, empirical findings obtained from the structural equation modelling analysis (SEM) would theoretically validate that ethics-based salesperson behaviour influences the firm's reputation and enhances customer satisfaction particularly regarding both the salesperson and the firm. The model evaluates that these two customer satisfaction elements enhance B2B customer loyalty to the firm. Utilising the research on relational quality to develop the conceptual model (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014; Poujol et al. 2013; Rinenggo et al. 2024), the satisfaction construct is implemented at two tiers: satisfaction with the salesperson and satisfaction with the firm.

This study has two objectives. First, it examines how ethical salesperson behaviour influences satisfaction with the salesperson, satisfaction with the firm, and B2B customer loyalty in the healthcare-products sector. Second, it examines the effects of ethical salesperson behaviour and firm reputation on the two dimensions of customer satisfaction and on B2B customer loyalty. The study focuses on B2B customers in the company's West sales area, with organizational purchasing decision-makers serving as respondents.

METHODS

We conducted primary data collection for this quantitative study from April to July 2023. The population of this study consisted of companies that had become B2B consumers of PT Beiersdorf

Indonesia. A decision-maker involved in purchasing pharmaceutical products, such as an owner, pharmacist, or procurement department, represents each company unit. The B2B customers targeted in this study are part of the pharmaceutical sales networks include pharmacies, retail establishments (large, medium, and small), and clinics that purchase customer healthcare products (e.g. band-aid) in the West sales area: specifically Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang, and Bekasi. Distributors, wholesalers, and retailers constitute important components of the distribution channel for health care products. The pharmacy network serves as one of the potential sales channels for pharmaceutical products. Pharmacies, as pharmaceutical wholesalers, have experienced the highest annual growth rate of up to 35% from 2007 to 2010, in comparison to other distribution channels such as hospitals, clinics, and drug stores (Sari & Riva'i, 2016). The selection of the Java area, represented by the West area in this study, was made because it is the region with the highest population (approximately 4,000 customers annually) in Indonesia (PT Beiersdorf Indonesia, 2026), thus offering significant potential for business development.

This research uses purposive sampling. The online questionnaire for data collection uses Google Forms. The link was distributed to respondents who meet the research criteria. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and secrecy. The total number of company samples in this study was 305, with respondents completing the survey who held roles in the company related to purchasing decisions, namely owners, procurement personnel, and pharmacists.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis in this study was conducted using LISREL 8.8 statistical software. The study confirms theories regarding relationships among several reflective latent variables and involves a large sample size; therefore, SEM is highly appropriate for this analysis. The survey incorporates several constructs measured using Likert scales, ranging from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree'). The research survey consists of twenty items. For the SEM analysis in this study, the sample size required is at least ten times the number of question items (Hair et al. 2014), that is, 200 respondents. Questionnaire items were designed to be as concise as possible. A pretest was conducted with thirty respondents to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items; analysis using SPSS confirmed that validity and reliability requirements were met, allowing the main survey to proceed. Ethics-based salesperson is measured by four statements: honesty, providing information based on knowledge, trustworthiness, and factual accuracy. Firm reputation is measured by four statements: positive reputation, goodwill, recognition, and positive evaluation. Satisfaction with the salesperson is measured by three statements: satisfaction with the relationship between salesperson and individual company, satisfaction with the service, and the salesperson as a valuable asset. Satisfaction with the firm is measured by four statements: the business excellence, satisfaction with service, satisfaction with the relationship between individual company and the firm, and satisfaction to fair business practices. Loyalty is measured by five statements: being the primary choice, intention to shop in the future, willingness to recommend, always being the shopping choice, and willingness to allocate a specific shopping budget. The Sobel test was used for mediation analysis because the SEM analysis employed Lisrel 8.8 (the conventional version); this tool is designed primarily to assess overall model fit and direct effect.

This research demonstrates how ethics-based salesperson behaviour builds loyalty by establishing links through mediation analysis (see Figure 1). It highlights its impact on firm reputation, satisfaction with the salesperson, and satisfaction with the firm, all of which underpin B2B customer loyalty. Satisfaction has been demonstrated to mediate in multiple areas (Islam et al. 2021; Khowjoy et al. 2023; C. Y. Lu et al. 2020; Mansouri et al. 2022) and firm reputation (Islam et al. 2021; Suhartanto, 2019; Wijaya et al. 2022). Based on the above reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: Ethics-based salesperson behaviour has a positive effect on B2B customer loyalty.

H2: Ethics-based salesperson behaviour has a positive effect on the firm's reputation.

H3a: Ethics-based salesperson behaviour has a positive effect on B2B customer satisfaction with the salesperson.

H3b: Ethics-based salesperson behaviour has a positive effect on B2B customer satisfaction with the firm.

H4: B2B customer satisfaction with the salesperson has a positive effect on B2B customer satisfaction with the firm.

H5a: Firm reputation has a positive effect on B2B customer satisfaction with the salesperson.

H5b: Firm reputation has a positive effect on B2B

customer satisfaction with the firm.

H6: Firm reputation has a positive effect on B2B customer loyalty.

H7: B2B customer satisfaction with the firm has a positive effect on B2B customer loyalty.

H8: B2B customer satisfaction with the salesperson has a positive effect on B2B customer loyalty.

H9: B2B customer satisfaction with the salesperson serves as a mediator between ethics-based salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty.

H10: B2B customer satisfaction with the firm serves as a mediator between ethics-based salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty.

H11: Firm reputation serves as a mediator between ethics-based salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty.

On the basis of the relationship marketing and social exchange theory, our conceptual model is illustrated through five constructs in Figure 1. The ethics-based salesperson behaviour variable consists of four items (Mansouri et al. 2022; Wijaya et al. 2022). A firm reputation consists of four items (Islam et al. 2021; Suhartanto, 2019). Satisfaction with a salesperson consists of three items (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014). Satisfaction with a firm consists of four items (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014; Mansouri et al. 2022). Customer loyalty was a five-item construct (Mansouri et al. 2022; Wijaya et al. 2022).

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

The participants in this research are business entities. Based on the research data (Table 1), it is known that the majority of respondents in this study own a pharmacy (73.8%). This study explains the relationship between sales ethics and increasing customer satisfaction in the distribution channel between individual salesperson and the company. Longer business-to-business relations would imply loyalty relationships. Therefore, the perception of customers who have a longer-term relationship is crucial for the company. Based on the data in Table 1, it is known that the majority of respondents in this study have had a relationship with the company for a fairly long time, namely more than three years (65.6%). Meanwhile, the data in Table 1 shows that the relationship between the company that is a customer and the salesperson is still balanced between a period of less than two years (51.5%) and more than three years (48.5%). The majority of respondents (56.7%) experienced one-to-two meetings per month between customers and salesperson. However, some (43.3%) had more than three meetings per month. These results demonstrate that the majority of respondents in this study had a fairly satisfactory number of meetings between salesperson and business customers each month. Therefore, assessing these business customers' perceptions will offer important information regarding the company's performance.

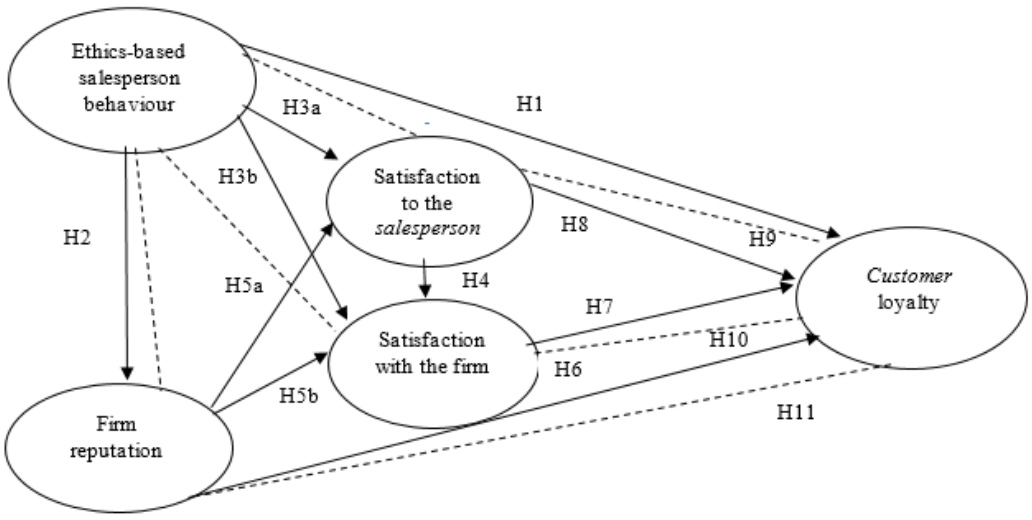


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Table 1. Characteristics of B2B Customers

Items		Frequency	Percent (%)
Business type	Pharmacy	225	73.8
	Retailer	27	8.9
	Wholesaler	15	4.9
	Distributor	35	11.5
	Clinic	3	1.0
Sales area (in West)	Jakarta	113	37
	Bogor	76	24.9
	Bekasi	55	18
	Tangerang	61	20
Position in Company	Owner	112	36.7
	Procurement	92	30.2
	Pharmacist	101	33.1
Relationship to Firm (years)	1–2	105	34.4
	3–4	99	32.5
	≥5	101	33.1
Relationship to Salesperson (years)	1–2	157	51.5
	3–4	77	25.2
	≥5	71	23.3
Gender	Men	116	38.0
	Women	189	62.0
Age	<25	38	12.5
	25–35	111	36.4
	36–45	96	31.5
	46–55	50	16.4
	>55	10	3.3
Education	Vocational school	81	26.5
	Diploma/ Associate degree	31	10.2
	Bachelor degree	188	61.6
	Postgraduate	5	1.6
Income/ month	<3 million rupiah	25	8.2
	3-5 million rupiah	150	49.2
	>5 million rupiah	130	42.6
Number of meetings with salesperson (monthly)	1–2 times	173	56.7
	3–4 times	116	38
	>4 times	16	5.2

Note: The average exchange rate during August 2023 was 1 USD equal to 15.384.54 rupiah (Bank Indonesia, 2023).

Measurement Model Results

This quantitative research uses structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis to determine the relationships among its constructs: ethics-based salesperson behaviour, firm reputation, customer satisfaction with salesperson, customer satisfaction with the firm, and B2B customer loyalty. The explanation of the relationships among the constructs of ethics-based salesperson behaviour highlights their influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The first step in the SEM analysis is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test to determine whether the research model is valid and in accordance with the theory. Next, a structural model analysis is conducted to determine the relationships between the constructs simultaneously. These two stages of analysis are carried out to test the suitability of the research concept and assess the strength of the relationships between variables, both directly and indirectly.

The empirical results of the CFA model indicated thatOverall, the fit indices indicate an acceptable model fit : CMIN/df = 2.64; GFI = 0.89; IFI = 0.99; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.023; RMSEA = 0.068. Table 2 shows that all factors had average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50, and the composite reliability for each factor was above 0.60. The AVE for each construct meets the recommended cutoff value, surpassing the 0.5 threshold (Hair et al. 2014). These findings suggest that the measures used in this study are both reliable and valid, reinforcing the robustness of the model. Discriminant validity results explain the validity of the research model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows that all constructs in this study have correlations no greater than the square roots of the AVE values. The validity results (Table 3) demonstrate adequate discriminant validity and support the theoretical measurement model.

Hypothesis Analysis

The analysis of the hypotheses proposed in this study was conducted through the structural model analysis in SEM. The results indicate that among the direct-effect hypotheses, three were not supported (H1, H5b, and H8). Of the three mediation hypotheses, H9 and H10 were not supported, whereas H11 was supported. Table 4 summarizes the results of the structural model for the relationship between ethics-based salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty. Three direct

influence hypotheses were not supported. The indirect influence hypothesis was supported by one hypothesis.

Regression path analysis demonstrated that the direct relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty (β=0.10, p>0.05) was not supported in this study (H1 is not supported). Although ethical salesperson behaviour significantly affected both satisfaction constructs, the Sobel test did not provide evidence that either satisfaction with the salesperson or satisfaction with the firm mediated the relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and customer loyalty. The Relationship Marketing (RM) theory emphasizes the value of sustaining corporate relationships, highlighting commitment, trust, and satisfaction as essential elements for fostering robust B2B connections (Ahmad et al. 2020; Ferro-Soto et al. 2025; Q. Lu et al. 2021; Wei, 2022). The hypothesis for the relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and customer loyalty through satisfaction with the firm and satisfaction with the salesperson showed statistically supported (H3a, H3b, H4, and H7 were supported). Customer satisfaction serves as the foundation for measuring the success of service. The concept of satisfaction highlights the importance of delivering products to customers, which necessitates the establishment of trust and credibility, as well as actions related to honesty, responsibility, and fairness (Valentine, 2009; Wray et al. 1994). Satisfaction may arise from the perception that members of an organization comprehend ethical behaviors.

Table 2. Measurement analysis of constructs: factor loadings, validity, and reliability

Variable, Indicator Scale Item	Std. Loading
Ethical salesperson behaviour (AVE = 0.77; CR = 0.95; CA = 0.93)	
Honest	0.84
Accurate information based on product knowledge	0.88
Trustworthy	0.89
Factual information	0.90
Firm reputation (AVE = 0.73; CR = 0.92; CA = 0.92)	
Good reputation for keeping promises	0.86
Goodwill in the industry	0.84
Widely recognized	0.85
Good reviews	0.87
Satisfaction with salesperson (AVE = 0.80; CR = 0.92; CA = 0.92)	
Satisfied with the relationship between salesperson and company	0.87
Satisfaction with the salesperson's service	0.90
The salesperson is a valuable asset to the company	0.91
Satisfaction with the firm (AVE = 0.79; CR = 0.94; CA = 0.94)	
The company performs well in its business activities	0.84
Satisfied with company service level	0.86
Satisfied with inter-company relationships	0.92
Fair in business relationships	0.92
Customer loyalty (AVE = 0.73; CR = 0.93; CA = 0.93)	
Top choice	0.87
Continue shopping in the future	0.89
Recommend to friends, relatives, and colleagues	0.88
Will always shop	0.85
Willing to spend a large portion of their budget on shopping	0.77

Note: $\chi 2 = 419.64$; df = 159; $\chi 2/df = 2.64$; RMSE = 0.068; NNFI = 0.99; CFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.99; GFI = 0.89; SRMR = 0.023

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations of constructs

Variables	M	S	1	2	3	4	5
Ethic-based salesperson behavior	4.15	.78	.877				
Firm reputation	4.19	.71	.800**	.854			
Satisfaction with salesperson	4.13	.75	.803**	.835**	.894		
Satisfaction with the firm	4.14	.74	.787**	.850**	.875**	.888	
Customer loyalty	4.06	.73	.785**	.851**	.825**	.815**	.854

Note: N = 305. Diagonal elements are the square root of the average variance extracted of each construct. **P<.01 (2-tailed); M = Mean. S = Std. Deviation

Table 4. Summary of the direct and indirect effect hypothesis testing results

Hypotheses	β	t-value	P-value	Results
H1: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Customer loyalty	0.10	1.37	P>0.05	Not supported
H2: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Firm reputation	0.87	16.77	P<0.05**	Supported
H3a: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Satisfaction with salesperson	0.16	2.21	P<0.05**	Supported
H3b: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Satisfaction with the firm	0.20	3.26	P<0.05**	Supported
H4: Satisfaction with salesperson → Satisfaction with the firm	0.76	6.91	P<0.05**	Supported
H5a: Firm reputation → Satisfaction with salesperson	0.79	9.03	P<0.05**	Supported
H5b: Firm reputation → Satisfaction with the firm	0.01	0.10	P>0.05	Not supported
H6: Firm reputation → Customer loyalty	0.74	5.88	P<0.05**	Supported
H7: Satisfaction with the firm → Customer loyalty	0.26	2.19	P<0.05**	Supported
H8: Satisfaction with salesperson → Customer loyalty	-0.13	-0.80	P>0.05	Not supported
The Indirect Effects	Direct	Indirect	P-value	Mediation
H9: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Satisfaction with salesperson→ Customer loyalty	1.37	0.75	P>0.05	No mediation
H10: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Satisfaction with the firm → Customer loyalty	1.37	1.82	P>0.05	No mediation
H11: Ethic-based salesperson behavior → Firm reputation → Customer loyalty	1.37	5.55	P<0.05**	Full effect

Note: N = 305; β = Path coefficient; the mediation analysis uses the Sobel calculator from Quantpsy.org,**P < 0.05 (2-tailed).

The relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and firm reputation was also supported (H2 supported). Ethical salesperson services significantly enhance company positioning and reputation. Customers who have had a good experience with salesperson will form a positive perception of the company. Ethical salesperson behaviour may provide firms with a competitive advantage by strengthening customers' perceptions of the company (Zia et al. 2016). The workforce represents the company's reputation. Reputation is an important intangible asset based on customer observations and experiences and is used to describe quality (Nguyen et al. 2013; Suhartanto, 2019).

Although almost the direct path analysis result shows positive significance of the relationships between ethics-based salesperson behaviour and loyalty, the link between satisfaction with salesperson and customer loyalty was not supported (H8 was not supported). This finding is consistent with previous research which showed that satisfaction with salesperson could not form share of purchases directly (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014). Prior research has shown that B2B customers evaluate both direct economic benefits (e.g., sales volume and profit) and indirect benefits (e.g., branding, new product development, and HR development) derived from relational ties with a firm, which subsequently influence satisfaction (Choi & Choo, 2016; Zhang & Du, 2018). In general, business partners are more satisfied and loyal to collaborative relationships that generate indirect benefits. In terms of no empirical evidence for the formation of loyalty based on satisfaction with the salesperson, this study suggests that B2B customers see the indirect benefits derived from the relationship with the salesperson as insufficient to create loyalty, although satisfaction

with the firm itself can create loyalty. Additionally, the characteristics of pharmaceutical products and the market conditions in a developing country like Indonesia lead B2B customers to require a low perception of risk (Arditto et al. 2020). The study results demonstrate that the customers' perception of risk about the company is lower than the salesperson's role in enhancing loyalty. B2B customers may require more than satisfaction alone to develop loyalty; trust in the firm may also play an important role (Wedatama & Sukaatmadja, 2019; Wijaya et al. 2022).

The path analysis proved that the relationship between firm reputation and customer loyalty indicated a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.74$, $p<0.05$), thus supporting H6. This finding is consistent with previous research proposing that ethics-based salesperson behaviour are possible to increase customer retention (C. Y. Lu et al. 2020; Wijaya et al. 2022). The role of firm reputation in shaping satisfaction with salespersons is also significant (H5a is supported). Results show similar findings to other research on relationships between corporate reputation and satisfaction (Gelderman et al. 2021; Islam et al. 2021). However, a firm reputation does not directly influence customer satisfaction with the company (H5b not supported). B2B customers have more complex satisfaction dynamics, where customers require proof of the product or service they receive before expressing satisfaction with the company. Regarding the relationship marketing theory, a firm's reputation affects happiness with the firm via satisfaction with the salesperson (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The firm reputation is an essential factor, but the relational satisfaction generated through interactions with sales personnel is an important link for consumers, particularly in high involvement transactions such as those in the healthcare industry (Crosby et al. 1990; Pangarkar et al. 2022). The indirect relationship shows how the company's reputation affects customer satisfaction through the satisfaction of the salesperson. This result indicates the crucial role of salesperson in stabilising the company performance (Ferro-Soto et al. 2025; Gross et al. 2021; Reynolds & Arnold, 2000).

Furthermore, the indirect effect of relationship between ethics-based salesperson and customer loyalty were confirmed by the ninth (H9), tenth (H10), and eleventh (H11) hypotheses (Table 4). The result shows that no significant mediation effect was found on the relationship between ethic-based salesperson behavior to customer loyalty through satisfaction, both satisfaction with salesperson and satisfaction with the firm (the t-value of the relationship between the independent, mediating, and dependent variables less than 1.96), thus H9 and H10 were not supported. The absence of mediating effect from satisfaction was similar to the result of previous study (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014), and it offers contrasting evidence from claim which concluded that satisfaction has mediating role between ethics-based salesperson and loyalty (Mansouri et al. 2022). In this study, firm reputation fully mediates the relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty, as the indirect effect is significant whereas the direct effect is not significant. We can conclude that only one mediation hypothesis (H11) fully mediates the effect of ethic-based sales behaviour and B2B customer loyalty. The mediating effect of firm reputation might be the reason the indirect effect of satisfaction becomes insignificant.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study extends the relationship marketing and social exchange literature by examining how ethical salesperson behaviour and firm reputation are associated with satisfaction and loyalty in a B2B healthcare context. The findings show that ethical salesperson behaviour has a strong positive effect on firm reputation but no significant direct effect on customer loyalty. Firm reputation significantly influences satisfaction with the salesperson and customer loyalty, whereas its direct effect on satisfaction with the firm is not significant. Satisfaction with the firm significantly affects customer loyalty, while satisfaction with the salesperson does not have a significant direct effect on loyalty.

The reported mediation results further indicate that firm reputation plays an important intermediary role in the relationship between ethical salesperson behaviour and B2B customer loyalty, although this mediation result should be reported using the Sobel test. In contrast, satisfaction with the salesperson and satisfaction with the firm do not significantly mediate this relationship.

Recommendations

From a managerial perspective, firms may strengthen ethical selling practices through continuous ethics training, accurate product communication, and relationship-oriented sales management. Future studies should examine additional relational mechanisms, particularly trust, commitment, and different dimensions of B2B loyalty, and should test the model across firms and healthcare-product categories to improve the generalizability of the findings

FUNDING STATEMENT: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT: During the preparation of this work, the authors used QuillBot to check grammar and polish the text in several sub-chapters, so it becomes more coherent. After using this service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed, and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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