

## The Influence of Brand Equity and Customer Bonding on the Loyalty of Beauty MSME Consumers with Satisfaction as a Mediating Variable

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### Abstract

In the beauty industry, business competition is very tight so consumer satisfaction is very important to maintain a business in a competitive market. The main aim of this research is to analyze the influence of brand equity and customer bonding on the loyalty of beauty MSME consumers with satisfaction as a mediating variable. The results of this research confirm that brand equity has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction. Customer bonding does not have a significant influence on consumer satisfaction. The results further confirm that brand equity, customer bonding, and consumer satisfaction have a significant effect on consumer loyalty. The mediating effect of satisfaction can mediate the relationship between brand equity and consumer loyalty, while the relationship between customer bonding and consumer loyalty. consumer satisfaction is not able to mediate it. It is hoped that the implications of this research can provide a fundamental contribution in the form of supporting information regarding strategic steps and strengthening models in optimizing the resources owned by creative industry business players, especially for beauty MSMEs.

### Keywords:

Brand Equity,  
Customer  
Bonding,  
Customer  
Satisfaction,  
Customer Loyalty

## INTRODUCTION

The existence of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in the beauty sector has an important role in a country's economy (Suryani et al., 2021). Beauty MSMEs are small and medium businesses that operate in various aspects of the beauty industry, such as skin care, hair, cosmetic products, spa and salon services (Na-nan et al., 2015). Beauty MSMEs can make a significant contribution to a country's economic growth (Irwansyah et al., 2021). They create jobs for residents, both as beauticians and in their business operations. The growth of MSMEs is currently experiencing quite complicated business upheavals (Basoeky et al., 2021). However, amid increasingly fierce competition, many beauty MSMEs are facing problems in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty (Widati, 2022). The substance of this research problem is in the brand equity aspect, namely, beauty MSMEs often have limited marketing budgets to build their brands, so they often have difficulty promoting their brands widely. The issue of brand equity is one of the problems often faced by MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in the beauty sector, but lacks in explaining their brand identity to consumers (Sudrartono et al., 2022). A lack of understanding of what the brand represents and how it differs from competitors can be a problem. The results of the (Gong et al., 2020) and (Vijayakumar, 2018), studies state that brand equity factors play an important role in

maintaining consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The issue of brand equity is one of the problems often faced by MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in the beauty sector, but lacks in explaining their brand identity to consumers. A lack of understanding of what the brand represents and how it differs from competitors can be a problem.

Apart from brand equity factors, customer bonding is also considered to have an important role in forming consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Gustini et al., 2022). Beauty MSMEs may experience problems providing consistent customer service. This may include variations in service quality or a lack of responsiveness to customer needs (Hermawan & Junaidi, 2022). One important aspect of customer bonding is a deep understanding of customer needs, preferences, and expectations (Putri, et al., 2021). If beauty MSMEs fail to understand this, they may fail to meet customer expectations. Some beauty MSMEs may fail to create a personalized experience for customers. This can make customers feel underappreciated or ignored. Customer problems that are not resolved properly can result in customer dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction can spread through negative word-of-mouth which can damage a business's reputation (Oktaviani et al., 2021). The results of the (Kereh et al., 2023) and (Prihatinta et al., 2023), studies explain that the existence of customer bonding in the beauty industry is vital for the industry's competitive advantage. Proper management of customer bonding will have implications for increasing consumer satisfaction and high levels of loyalty. Strong customer relationships are often the basis for continued consumer loyalty. Customers who feel emotionally attached to a business, perhaps because of the personal relationships they have formed, tend to become loyal customers.

One of the benefits and impacts of consumer satisfaction is loyalty. Loyal consumers will be loyal customers, consume the products and product lines offered, are not tempted by competing products, have various positive experiences from using the product, and have a long-term relationship with the company (Putri et al., 2020). Consumer loyalty is a form of consumer loyalty to the company, brand, or product (Sherly et al., 2020). Loyal consumers are customers who have a commitment to a brand, store, or supplier from a positive perspective and have an impact on long-term purchases. Customer loyalty is influenced by various factors, such as: repeat product purchases which can be measured in terms of units or time of purchase. Purchase of other products or product lines offered by the company. Then the customer's willingness to recommend the product to other parties (Silalahi et al., 2020). customers are also immune to competitors because they do not want to switch to products offered by competitors (Sinaga et al., 2020). Consumer loyalty will be formed if consumers feel optimal satisfaction with the value and quality of the products offered by the company. Loyal customers are a long-term investment for the company because they can provide growth and existence for the business.

The existence of a product marketing business is very dependent on consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Sudirman, Halim, Sinaga, et al., 2021). Products that provide high value or quality for consumers will create consumer satisfaction (Sudirman, Halim, Nainggolan, et al., 2021). This is because consumers who are satisfied with the product will make repeat purchases, recommend the product to others, and become loyal customers (Halim et al., 2021). Thus, this impact will make a positive contribution to business development and progress. Consumer satisfaction is related to a person's feelings of happiness or disappointment that arise after

comparing perceptions of a product's perceived performance with consumer expectations (Sudirman, Efendi, et al., 2020). According to (Sudirman, Sherly, et al., 2020), consumer satisfaction is a person's feeling of joy or disappointment that arises after comparing the performance of the product they are thinking about with the expected performance (Sudirman, Wijaya, et al., 2021). This shows that consumer satisfaction will be created from a valuable product or service after the consumer consumes the service.

A dynamic market situation with a high level of competition, as well as a diversity of products to meet consumer needs and desires, means that one effort to win this competition and conditions is to create satisfaction to encourage or form customer loyalty. Various programs and efforts are made to create satisfaction and form customer loyalty in the beauty industry. This can be achieved by focusing on customers, producing high-quality products, proper management of brand equity and customer bonding, as well as clear and consistent service processes. There is a positive unidirectional relationship between brand equity and customer bonding on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. To form consumer loyalty, various efforts can be made by companies. Various programs and strategies can be implemented to form the most optimal type of customer loyalty. The level of consumer loyalty will be influenced by the level of management of brand equity and customer bonding as well as consumer satisfaction. Thus, efforts to optimize consumer satisfaction will have implications for high consumer loyalty. By the background of the problem explained and several phenomena that occur in the field, the main aim of the research is to analyze the influence of brand equity and customer bonding on the loyalty of beauty MSME consumers with satisfaction as a mediating variable.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a library and field research design with a quantitative approach. The research was conducted from June 2023 to August 2023. The location selection was adjusted to the number of beauty MSMEs in Pematang Siantar City. According to (Hair, 2014), if the population size is unknown, the sample size can be determined from 5-10 times the number of indicators used in a single construct. This research used 17 indicators from 4 existing variable dimensions, so the number of research samples obtained was  $17 \times 10 = 170$  samples. Data collection in this research used the observation method by observing directly in the field and documentation came from secondary data in the form of documents and structured interviews using questionnaire instruments. The data analysis technique uses the SEM method with Partial Least Squares Modeling (PLS-SEM). Each hypothesis proposed in this research will be tested using SmartPLS Version 3.0 software. A Structural Equation Model (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Square was carried out for hypothesis testing. SEM is a multivariate data analysis method consisting of factor analysis and regression analysis, which aims to evaluate the relationship between variables in a model, which in this case is the relationship between indicators (manifest variables) and constructs (latent variables) known as model assessment measurement, also between latent variables only or usually referred to as structural model assessment (Ghozali, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptions of Research Respondents

Table 1: Description of Research Respondents

| Categories            | Details        | Amount | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Gender                | Men            | 75     | 44.12          |
|                       | Woman          | 95     | 55.88          |
| Age (years)           | 20-29          | 35     | 20.59          |
|                       | 30-39          | 55     | 32.35          |
|                       | 40-49          | 53     | 31.17          |
|                       | 50-59          | 27     | 15.89          |
| Level of education    | High School    | 120    | 70.59          |
|                       | Bachelors      | 45     | 26.47          |
|                       | Masters        | 5      | 2.94           |
| Types of Beauty MSMEs | Barbershop     | 45     | 26.48          |
|                       | Fashion        | 60     | 35.29          |
|                       | Cosmetics Shop | 41     | 24.12          |
|                       | Spa Beauty     | 24     | 14.11          |

Source: Processed Data (2023)

From the results of the recapitulation of the questionnaire, information was obtained regarding the characteristics of the respondents, namely 44.12% men (75 people) and 55.88% women (95 people). For the age range, the majority of respondents were aged between 30-39 years with a percentage of 32.35% (55 people) and the most dominant education level for those who filled out the questionnaire came from high school level education with a percentage of 70.59% (120 people). Most types of beauty MSMEs come from Fashion with a percentage of 35.29% (60 MSMEs). Overall, 170 respondents filled out this research questionnaire from beauty MSMEs.

### Outer Model Measurement

Table 2: Validity, Reliability, and R-Square test

| Variables             | Items                        | Outer Loading | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Composite Reliability | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Brand Equity          |                              |               | <b>0.720</b>                     | <b>0.911</b>          | <b>0.870</b>     |
|                       | Perceived Quality (BE1)      | 0.881         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Brand Awareness (BE2)        | 0.870         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Brand Loyalty (BE3)          | 0.857         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Brand Association (BE4)      | 0.783         |                                  |                       |                  |
| Customer Bonding      |                              |               | <b>0.631</b>                     | <b>0.872</b>          | <b>0.803</b>     |
|                       | Awareness Bonding (CB1)      | 0.748         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Relationship Bonding (CB2)   | 0.820         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Advocacy Bonding (CB3)       | 0.862         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Community Bonding (CB4)      | 0.740         |                                  |                       |                  |
| Customer Satisfaction |                              |               | <b>0.759</b>                     | <b>0.926</b>          | <b>0.893</b>     |
|                       | Product Quality (PQ1)        | 0.893         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Service Quality (PQ2)        | 0.950         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Emotional Factors (PQ3)      | 0.773         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Price(PQ4)                   | 0.859         |                                  |                       |                  |
| Consumer Loyalty      |                              |               | <b>0.697</b>                     | <b>0.902</b>          | <b>0.853</b>     |
|                       | Repeat Purchase (CL1)        | 0.806         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Provide references (CL2)     | 0.747         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Faithfulness (CL3)           | 0.896         |                                  |                       |                  |
|                       | Line-to-line purchases (CL4) | 0.882         |                                  |                       |                  |

| Variables             | Items           | Outer Loading | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Composite Reliability    | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| <b>R-Square</b>       |                 |               |                                  |                          |                  |
|                       | <i>R-square</i> |               |                                  | <i>R-square Adjusted</i> |                  |
| Customer Satisfaction | 0.131           |               |                                  | 0.120                    |                  |
| Consumer Loyalty      | 0.616           |               |                                  | 0.609                    |                  |

Source: Data Processing Results (2023)

In the validity test presented in Table 2 above, the value of each loading factor and AVE on the indicator of brand equity, customer bonding, customer satisfaction, and consumer loyalty is above 0.7 for the loading factor and above 0.5 for AVE, so it indicates that all items used in the construct are valid. Furthermore, the value for each reliability as measured by the composite reliability value and Cronbach's alpha, is known that brand equity, customer bonding, customer satisfaction, and consumer have a value above 0.7, thus indicating that all research variables have an excellent reliability value. Furthermore, looking at the R-square value of the endogenous variable, the value obtained is 0.131 for customer satisfaction, This shows that overall the ability of exogenous variables to explain customer satisfaction is weak. Then the R-square value of the next endogenous variable, namely consumer loyalty, was also obtained, which was 0.616, which means that overall the ability of the exogenous variables to explain consumer loyalty is moderate (Ghozali 2014).

### Hypothesis Test

Furthermore, to prove the hypothesis testing, a significance test was carried out to determine the relationship between the exogenous variables and the endogenous variable. The significance criterion was seen from the p-value. With a significance level of 5%, if the p-value between the exogenous variables and the endogenous variable is less than 0.05, it means that the exogenous variables have a significant effect on the endogenous variable. In contrast, if the value is higher than 0.05, it means that the exogenous variables do not have a significant effect in building the endogenous variable. The results of the hypothesis test are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Hypothesis Results

| Hypothesis                                  | Coefficients | t-Statistics | P-Value | Results         |
|---|--------------|--------------|---------|-----------------|
| Brand Equity→Customer Satisfaction (H1)     | 0.223        | 2,313        | 0.021   | <b>Accepted</b> |
| Customer Bonding→Customer Satisfaction (H2) | 0.175        | 1,780        | 0.076   | <b>Rejected</b> |
| Brand Equity→Consumer Loyalty (H3)          | 0.465        | 6,784        | 0,000   | <b>Accepted</b> |
| Customer Bonding→Consumer Loyalty (H4)      | 0.302        | 3,943        | 0,000   | <b>Accepted</b> |
| Customer Satisfaction→Consumer Loyalty (H5) | 0.186        | 4,761        | 0,000   | <b>Accepted</b> |

Source: Data Processing Results (2023)

Based on the results of testing the first hypothesis (H1), results were obtained that led to positive and significant results between brand equity and customer satisfaction. These results prove that the better the quality perception and brand awareness, the stronger the brand equity will be. Brand equity can also influence consumer perceptions of product or service quality. If a brand has a positive image,



consumers will tend to consider the brand's products or services to be of higher quality, which can increase their satisfaction when using the product. Consumers are often more likely to purchase products or services from reputable and trustworthy brands (Machado et al., 2019). Customers who are satisfied with MSME beauty brands tend to recommend the business to their friends, family, and colleagues. This is a powerful form of loyalty because recommendations from satisfied customers often have a positive impact on business growth. Strong brand equity can also build consumer trust, which in turn can increase their satisfaction. In addition, previous positive experiences with the same brand can increase consumer expectations for future products or services from that brand. If a brand has provided satisfaction before, consumers will be more likely to be satisfied with their next purchase (Dlačić & Kežman, 2014). Brands that have strong equity also tend to provide better consumer support, including more responsive customer service and post-sales assistance. This can increase consumer satisfaction.

Based on the results of testing the second hypothesis (H2), results were obtained that led to positive and significant results between customer bonding and customer satisfaction. Strong customer bonding refers to a strong emotional and functional connection between consumers and a business or brand. Customer bonding has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction because it involves positive interactions and experiences between consumers and businesses, which in turn influences consumer perceptions and levels of satisfaction (Hermawan & Junaidi, 2022). Consumers who feel engaged with a business are more likely to provide valuable feedback. They may be more open to providing suggestions or criticism that can help the business to continually improve its products or services. This allows businesses to adapt and improve based on consumer needs, which can increase satisfaction. Consumers who feel they have a strong connection with a business are more likely to have a consistent and positive experience. They know what to expect and trust that the business will meet their expectations, ultimately increasing ongoing satisfaction. Furthermore, customer bonding can increase the perception of added value provided by a business or brand (Oktaviani et al., 2021). Consumers may see that they are getting more than just a product or service, such as a personal connection and a more meaningful experience, which can increase brand satisfaction.

Based on the results of testing the third hypothesis (H3), results were obtained that led to positive and significant results between brand equity and consumer loyalty. These results prove that positive brand equity can help create trust among consumers. Consumers tend to be more loyal to brands they trust. They feel confident that the products or services they buy from beauty MSMEs will meet their expectations. On the other hand, strong brand quality creates positive expectations for MSME beauty products or services. If a business consistently meets or even exceeds consumer expectations, consumers will be satisfied with their experience. Continuous satisfaction is key to maintaining loyalty (Shamim & Mohsin Butt, 2013). Furthermore, consumers who feel attached to MSME beauty brands tend to remain loyal even when there are other alternatives available in the market. They will likely choose a product or service from that brand even if the price is slightly higher, because they feel emotionally connected or have had a previous positive experience with the brand. High brand equity can encourage consumers to participate in loyalty programs or reward programs offered by beauty MSMEs. This can create stronger

bonds and encourage repeat purchases because they feel emotionally connected or have had previous positive experiences with the brand. High brand equity can encourage consumers to participate in loyalty programs or reward programs offered by beauty MSMEs (Han et al., 2015).

Based on the results of testing the fourth hypothesis (H4), results were obtained that led to positive and significant results between customer bonding and consumer loyalty. These results prove that customer ties enable beauty MSMEs to be more responsive to customer problems or questions. Good and responsive support can increase loyalty because customers feel that the business cares about their needs. Beauty MSMEs that have built customer bonding usually focus more on providing consistent quality products and services (Balci et al., 2019). This creates trust that customers will always get good value from the business. Then, beauty MSMEs can often create more personal relationships with their customers than large companies. This can include direct interactions with business owners or friendly staff. This personal connection can spark an emotional bond between the customer and the business, supporting loyalty. Beauty MSMEs that have strong ties with customers tend to provide better customer service. They listen more to customer needs and wants, which can increase satisfaction and make customers feel valued (Kereh et al., 2023). Customers who feel emotionally connected to an MSME beauty business tend to remain loyal and recommend the business to friends and family. Recommendations from satisfied customers can generate more potential customers who will become loyal customers.

Based on the results of testing the fifth hypothesis (H5), results were obtained that led to positive and significant results between customer satisfaction and consumer loyalty. Consumer satisfaction is an important factor in maintaining ongoing loyalty. When customers are satisfied, they are more likely to remain loyal and not look for alternatives. This reduces the risk of losing customers that can occur if they are dissatisfied. MSME beauty businesses that listen to their customers' needs and input and respond well to customer questions or problems will increase customer satisfaction (Chou et al., 2014). Better customer support can help maintain loyalty. These results prove that satisfied customers are more likely to recommend beauty MSME businesses to friends, family, or other people. Recommendations from satisfied customers can increase the customer base and support business growth. Consumer satisfaction can encourage participation in loyalty programs or reward programs offered by beauty MSMEs. Satisfied customers are more likely to take advantage of these incentives which can increase loyalty in the long term (Vo et al., 2019). Additionally, with a high level of satisfaction, customers will provide positive feedback more often, which can strengthen business relationships and create stronger bonds. Positive feedback also provides valuable information that can be used to improve and enhance products or services.

Furthermore, to determine the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between brand equity and customer bonding on consumer loyalty, a mediation test was carried out using an indirect effect approach, with an explanation of the results as follows:

Table 4: Mediation Test Results Based on Indirect Effect

| Hypothesis   | Coefficients | t-Statistics | P-Value      | Results         |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Brand Equity→Customer Satisfaction→Consumer Loyalty (H6)     | 0.042        | 2,396        | <b>0.017</b> | <b>Accepted</b> |
| Customer Bonding→Customer Satisfaction→Consumer Loyalty (H7) | 0.033        | 1,458        | <b>0.145</b> | <b>Rejected</b> |

Source: *Data Processing Results (2022)*

Based on the results of mediation test data processed based on indirect effects, a conclusion can be drawn that the customer satisfaction variable can mediate the relationship between brand equity and consumer loyalty as proven by the p-value of 0.017, which is below 0.05. This is because consumer satisfaction is an intermediary that connects a strong brand image with consumer loyalty. When consumers are satisfied, they are more likely to remain loyal to the brand. Satisfaction creates a strong emotional and functional foundation for long-term relationships between brands and customers. Strong brand equity, such as a positive brand image and good reputation, can create positive expectations among consumers. When consumers purchase a product or service with these expectations and are satisfied with their experience, they will feel that the brand has met or even exceeded the brand's expectations. The results of the next mediation test based on the indirect effect, a conclusion can be drawn that the customer satisfaction variable does not mediate the relationship between customer bonding and consumer loyalty as proven by the p-value of 0.145, which is below 0.05. This is because consumer satisfaction and customer bonding are two different concepts. Satisfaction is a customer's evaluation of their experience with a particular product or service. In contrast, customer bonding covers broader aspects involving emotional and functional relationships between customers and businesses. Satisfaction is only one element in the process of forming strong customer bonds. In some cases, customers may feel attached to a business because they have been loyal customers for years, without ever having a completely satisfactory experience with any transaction. They may be familiar with the business or feel comfortable with the products or services offered.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research conclude that brand equity has a positive and significant effect on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. To build strong brand equity, beauty MSMEs need to pay attention to several factors, including product or service quality, brand image, consistent brand communication, and positive interactions with customers. Through these efforts, businesses can create solid relationships with their customers and ensure continued consumer loyalty. Furthermore, the mediating effect of consumer satisfaction on the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction was found to be significant. Consumer satisfaction resulting from positive experiences with a brand helps in maintaining ongoing consumer loyalty. When consumers continue to feel satisfied, they are more likely to remain loyal customers in the long term. Thus, customer satisfaction acts as a link between brand equity and consumer loyalty by changing consumers' positive perceptions of the brand into concrete loyalty behavior. This underlines the importance of



understanding and monitoring consumer satisfaction levels as a key factor in maintaining and increasing customer loyalty to beauty MSMEs.

The results of the subsequent research concluded that customer bonding did not have a significant effect on consumer satisfaction, while for the effect of customer bonding on consumer loyalty the results had a significant effect. The result is that customer bonding often involves strong emotional aspects, such as a sense of attachment to the brand or a feeling that the business understands and cares about customer needs. This can keep customers loyal despite some unsatisfactory experiences. To build strong customer bonds, businesses need to focus on effective communication, positive consumer experiences, and responsiveness to consumer needs and desires. It is important to remember that customer bonding takes time to build and maintain, and it involves ongoing efforts to build positive relationships with customers. Beauty MSMEs can achieve this with good communication, superior customer service, consistent product or service quality, and positive interactions with customers. Customer bonding can lead to consumer loyalty because it involves other elements that create a strong and sustainable relationship between customers and businesses. Thus, businesses need to understand and manage both consumer satisfaction and customer bonding to achieve sustainable consumer loyalty. and positive interactions with customers. Customer bonding can lead to consumer loyalty because it involves other elements that create a strong and sustainable relationship between customers and businesses. Thus, businesses need to understand and manage both consumer satisfaction and customer bonding to achieve sustainable consumer loyalty. and positive interactions with customers. Customer bonding can lead to consumer loyalty because it involves other elements that create a strong and sustainable relationship between customers and businesses. Thus, businesses need to understand and manage both consumer satisfaction and customer bonding to achieve sustainable consumer loyalty.

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