

Building Customer Loyalty: The Role of Customer Experience and Product Quality Among Skintific Users in Kolaka

Membangun Loyalitas Pelanggan: Peran Customer Experience dan Kualitas Produk pada Pengguna Skintific di Kolaka

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of customer experience and product quality on customer loyalty in the skincare industry, focusing on Skintific beauty product users in Kolaka Regency, Indonesia. The research adopts a quantitative approach, collecting data through a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents. The findings reveal that both customer experience and product quality significantly contribute to customer loyalty, with product quality having a slightly stronger impact. A positive brand experience enhances consumer engagement, but perceived product effectiveness and reliability remain key factors in fostering long-term loyalty. This study concludes that a strategic balance between experiential marketing and product innovation is crucial for maintaining customer retention. Future research is encouraged to examine additional factors such as brand reputation, pricing strategies, and social influence in shaping customer commitment.

Keywords: Customer Experience, Product Quality, Customer Loyalty, Skincare Industry

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh customer experience dan kualitas produk terhadap loyalitas pelanggan dalam industri skincare, dengan fokus pada pengguna produk kecantikan Skintific di Kabupaten Kolaka, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang dibagikan kepada responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa customer experience dan kualitas produk berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap loyalitas pelanggan, di mana kualitas produk memiliki pengaruh yang sedikit lebih besar. Pengalaman positif terhadap merek dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan konsumen, tetapi efektivitas dan keandalan produk tetap menjadi faktor utama dalam membangun loyalitas jangka panjang. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keseimbangan strategis antara pemasaran berbasis pengalaman dan inovasi produk sangat penting dalam mempertahankan pelanggan. Penelitian lebih lanjut disarankan untuk meneliti faktor lain, seperti reputasi merek, strategi harga, dan pengaruh sosial dalam membentuk komitmen pelanggan.

Kata Kunci: Customer Experience, Kualitas Produk, Loyalitas Pelanggan, Industri Skincare

1. Introduction

The global beauty industry has experienced significant growth, driven by heightened consumer awareness and evolving skincare preferences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Indonesia, as one of the fastest-growing beauty markets, has witnessed a surge in skincare product consumption, with both local and international brands competing to secure customer loyalty (Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009). One of the emerging brands making a notable impact in the Indonesian beauty industry is Skintific, a Canadian skincare brand that has successfully established itself as a top choice among consumers. Despite being relatively new to the market, Skintific has outperformed several well-established local brands, such as Scarlett and MS Glow, in terms of market share and customer retention. The increasing consumer preference for Skintific suggests that factors such as customer experience and product quality play a crucial

role in fostering loyalty (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehn, 2017). However, the extent to which these factors contribute to long-term brand commitment remains an area of empirical investigation.

Customer loyalty is a fundamental determinant of a brand's sustainability in a highly competitive industry (Oliver, 1999). Beyond repeat purchases, brand loyalty encompasses consumer commitment, advocacy, and resistance to switching brands despite competitive marketing efforts (Kotler & Keller, 2024). Customer experience plays a pivotal role in shaping loyalty, as it involves all direct and indirect interactions between consumers and a brand (Verhoef et al., 2009). A positive customer experience enhances emotional engagement, increases satisfaction, and strengthens consumer-brand relationships, ultimately leading to higher retention rates (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006). In the beauty industry, where sensory perception and personal preferences are crucial, customer experience can significantly influence purchase behavior (Schmitt, 1999).

Alongside customer experience, product quality is another key driver of brand loyalty. High-quality products that meet consumer expectations foster trust and encourage long-term relationships (Zeithaml, 1988). Product quality encompasses factors such as formulation effectiveness, safety, packaging, durability, and overall performance (Fornell et al., 1996). Consumers who perceive a product as superior in quality are more likely to develop strong brand trust and exhibit sustained loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). This is particularly important in the skincare industry, where concerns about product efficacy, skin compatibility, and safety influence consumer purchasing decisions (Ladhari, 2009). Brands that consistently deliver effective and reliable skincare solutions can secure lasting consumer trust, making product quality an essential factor in loyalty formation (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001).

The case of Skintific provides a compelling context to examine these dynamics. The brand has rapidly gained traction in Indonesia, surpassing several long-established local competitors in sales performance. Market reports indicate that Skintific ranks second among the best-selling skincare brands in Indonesia, with a significant portion of its customers making repeat purchases (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). A preliminary survey conducted in Kolaka Regency further supports this trend, revealing that 94.5% of respondents expressed loyalty to Skintific, with 38.2% making 2-3 repeat purchases, 32.7% repurchasing 4-5 times, and 29.1% purchasing more than five times. These findings highlight strong consumer retention and warrant an in-depth investigation into the underlying factors driving this loyalty.

Despite extensive research on customer loyalty, previous studies have presented inconsistent findings regarding the role of customer experience and product quality. Some scholars argue that customer experience has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Klaus & Maklan, 2013), whereas others suggest that its influence is relatively weak compared to other factors (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Similarly, while certain studies emphasize that product quality strongly predicts customer retention (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Pine & Gilmore, 1998), others argue that quality alone does not necessarily lead to loyalty unless accompanied by an emotional brand connection (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). These contradictory findings indicate a research gap, necessitating further empirical investigation to clarify the interplay between customer experience, product quality, and loyalty in the skincare industry.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on Skintific, a rising international skincare brand that has rapidly gained consumer trust in Indonesia. While existing studies have extensively explored customer loyalty in general retail and service industries, limited research specifically examines the skincare industry in an emerging market like Indonesia (Shankar et al., 2003). Moreover, most prior research has been conducted in broader beauty industry settings, whereas this study focuses on a single, fast-growing brand to provide deeper insights into the specific factors influencing consumer loyalty (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). By analyzing customer experience and product quality as key determinants, this study contributes a more refined understanding of loyalty formation in the skincare sector.

Given the intensifying competition in the beauty industry, this research is urgent for businesses seeking to refine their marketing strategies and enhance customer retention (Homburg et al., 2017). Understanding the relative impact of customer experience and product quality on loyalty will enable brands to allocate resources effectively, optimizing both experiential marketing and product innovation (Zeithaml, 1988). Furthermore, as consumer expectations continue to evolve, identifying the key loyalty drivers in the skincare market will provide actionable insights for brands aiming to strengthen long-term relationships with their customers (Kumar & Shah, 2004).

This study aims to bridge the existing research gap by examining the influence of customer experience and product quality on Skintific's customer loyalty in Kolaka Regency, Indonesia. By utilizing quantitative methodologies and structural equation modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of how these factors shape consumer behavior. The findings will contribute to marketing strategies in the beauty sector, offering practical insights for brands striving to enhance consumer retention. Additionally, this study serves as a valuable reference for future research, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving skincare markets and emerging consumer trends.

2. Literature Review

Customer Loyalty in the Beauty Industry

Customer loyalty is a crucial aspect of brand sustainability, particularly in competitive industries such as skincare and cosmetics (Oliver, 1999). It extends beyond repeat purchases and includes emotional attachment, brand advocacy, and resistance to competitors' marketing efforts (Kotler & Keller, 2024). In the skincare sector, where product efficacy and personal preferences play a significant role, customer loyalty is often influenced by multiple factors, including customer experience and product quality (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Previous research suggests that loyalty can be developed through a combination of functional and emotional benefits offered by a brand (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006).

In the context of skincare products, loyalty is often driven by a brand's ability to deliver **consistent and effective results** (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003). Unlike other industries where price sensitivity may be a dominant factor, consumers in the beauty industry prioritize **product performance, brand trust, and personalized experiences** (Zeithaml, 1988). Understanding the key drivers of loyalty in this industry is essential for brands seeking to establish long-term customer relationships.

The Role of Customer Experience in Building Loyalty

Customer experience (CX) is defined as the sum of all interactions and perceptions a customer has with a brand throughout their journey (Verhoef et al., 2009). It encompasses multiple touchpoints, including pre-purchase engagement, product usage, and post-purchase service (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). A positive customer experience fosters emotional connections, enhances satisfaction, and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Research has consistently shown that customer experience significantly influences brand loyalty. For instance, Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) found that brand experience strengthens customer attachment and leads to higher retention rates. Similarly, Klaus and Maklan (2013) argued that a seamless and engaging experience can differentiate brands in a crowded market. In the beauty industry, experiential marketing, such as personalized skincare consultations and immersive brand storytelling, plays a critical role in enhancing the consumer experience (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017).

However, some studies suggest that while CX contributes to loyalty, its impact may be less significant compared to other factors such as product quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, &

Berry, 1988). According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), customer experience alone may not guarantee repeat purchases unless it is supported by consistent product performance. This highlights the need for brands to strike a balance between experiential marketing and product innovation to maximize customer retention.

The Impact of Product Quality on Customer Loyalty

Product quality is one of the strongest predictors of customer loyalty, particularly in the skincare industry where safety, efficacy, and reliability are paramount (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). High-quality products that meet or exceed consumer expectations enhance satisfaction and encourage long-term brand commitment (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Consumers are more likely to repurchase from brands that deliver consistent results and meet their skincare needs (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001).

In the context of skincare, product quality is evaluated based on several attributes, including:

1. **Effectiveness** – The ability of the product to deliver visible skin improvements (Ladhari, 2009).
2. **Safety** – The absence of harmful ingredients and suitability for different skin types (Zeithaml, 1988).
3. **Packaging and usability** – Aesthetics, convenience, and ease of use contribute to overall brand perception (Shankar et al., 2003).

Several studies affirm that perceived product quality strongly influences brand trust and loyalty (Fornell et al., 1996). Kumar and Shah (2004) suggest that brands that consistently deliver high-quality products can create a strong competitive advantage. However, some researchers argue that product quality alone is not sufficient to drive loyalty unless it is complemented by positive brand experiences and emotional engagement (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). This aligns with the argument that while quality encourages repeat purchases, customer experience enhances brand advocacy and emotional commitment (Schmitt, 1999).

3. Research methods

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the influence of customer experience and product quality on customer loyalty among users of Skintific beauty products in Kolaka Regency. Quantitative methods are well-suited for measuring causal relationships between variables, enabling objective analysis and the generalizability of findings. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire survey distributed to 130 respondents, selected using purposive sampling to ensure participants met specific criteria, including having used Skintific products more than once.

The questionnaire was designed based on validated indicators for customer experience (sense, feel, think, act, relate), product quality (performance, durability, sensory characteristics, ethical profile), and customer loyalty (repeat purchase, retention, referrals). The survey employed a Likert scale (1–4) to capture varying degrees of agreement while preventing neutral bias. Prior to distribution, validity and reliability tests were conducted using SPSS 30, confirming that all measurement items met statistical requirements for internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7) and construct validity ($r > 0.3061$).

To test the proposed hypotheses, the study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through Smart PLS, a statistical technique suitable for analyzing latent variable relationships in small to moderate sample sizes. The measurement model (outer model) assessment included tests for convergent validity (AVE > 0.5), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion), and reliability (composite reliability > 0.7). The structural model (inner model) analysis examined path coefficients, R-square values, and effect sizes to determine the strength and significance of relationships among customer experience, product

quality, and customer loyalty. Hypothesis testing was conducted using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, applying a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ to establish statistical relevance.

This rigorous methodological approach ensures the reliability and validity of the findings, providing empirical insights into the factors influencing customer loyalty in the competitive skincare industry.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence on the influence of customer experience and product quality on customer loyalty among Skintific beauty product users in Kolaka Regency. The analysis, conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), reveals the extent to which these variables contribute to consumer retention and brand commitment. The results offer valuable insights into how positive customer experiences, characterized by sensory appeal, emotional engagement, and perceived brand value, enhance long-term loyalty. Similarly, product quality, encompassing formulation effectiveness, reliability, and aesthetic appeal, plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. By integrating statistical analyses and theoretical perspectives, this section discusses the significance of each factor, highlighting key trends, supporting literature, and potential implications for marketing strategies in the beauty industry.

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between customer experience, product quality, and customer loyalty among Skintific beauty product users in Kolaka Regency. Data were collected from 130 respondents through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The descriptive analysis reveals that the majority of Skintific users are female (94.6%), predominantly aged 21-30 years (57.7%), and primarily students (67.7%) with an income of less than Rp 1,000,000 (70%), indicating that even price-sensitive consumers remain loyal to the brand due to perceived product efficacy and quality. The customer experience variable demonstrated a very high category (mean = 3.46), indicating that factors such as product design, safety perception, and purchasing convenience significantly influence consumer engagement. Similarly, product quality scored very high (mean = 3.5), with strong consumer preferences for product reliability, sensory appeal, and ethical branding. The customer loyalty variable also exhibited a strong category (mean = 3.33), particularly in repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. The structural model results confirm that customer experience and product quality significantly influence customer loyalty, with an R-square value of 0.761, meaning that 76.1% of customer loyalty can be explained by these two factors, while 23.9% is influenced by other variables not included in the model. Furthermore, the outer model evaluation shows high validity and reliability, with factor loadings above 0.7 and an AVE score exceeding 0.5, confirming that all constructs are robust. The path coefficient analysis supports the hypothesis that customer experience and product quality positively and significantly impact consumer loyalty (T-statistic > 1.64 , p-value < 0.05), highlighting the crucial role of both factors in maintaining a competitive advantage in the skincare industry. These findings underscore the importance of continuous innovation in customer experience strategies and product quality enhancement to sustain brand loyalty and market dominance.

Table 1. Path Analysis

path coefficient	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
customer experience -> customer loyalty	0.443	0.444	0.110	4.033	0.000
product quality -> customer loyalty	0.460	0.460	0.109	4.219	0.000

The path coefficient analysis presented in Table 4.15 confirms the significant influence of customer experience and product quality on customer loyalty. The results indicate that

customer experience (X1) positively affects customer loyalty (Y) with a path coefficient of 0.443, meaning that an increase in customer experience leads to a 44.3% increase in customer loyalty. This relationship is statistically significant, as evidenced by a T-statistic of 4.033 (>1.64) and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), indicating strong support for the hypothesis.

Similarly, product quality (X2) has a path coefficient of 0.460, suggesting that an improvement in product quality contributes to a 46% increase in customer loyalty. This impact is also statistically significant, with a T-statistic of 4.219 and a p-value of 0.000, reinforcing the crucial role of product quality in shaping consumer retention.

The findings demonstrate that both customer experience and product quality exert substantial and positive effects on customer loyalty, with product quality having a slightly higher influence. The high statistical significance of both factors ($p = 0.000$) suggests that they function synergistically, reinforcing each other's effects on loyalty. Given that 76.1% of customer loyalty in this study is explained by these two factors, while 23.9% remains influenced by external variables, future research could explore additional determinants such as brand reputation, pricing strategies, and social influence.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of customer experience and product quality in shaping customer loyalty toward Skintific beauty products. A deeper examination of customer experience suggests that brands capable of creating a strong emotional connection with consumers tend to maintain higher levels of loyalty. Factors such as sensory appeal, emotional engagement, and perceived brand authenticity play a crucial role in customer retention (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). These results are consistent with previous research emphasizing that engaging and personalized brand experiences significantly enhance consumer satisfaction and drive repeat purchases (Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006). In the beauty industry, customers often develop emotional attachments to skincare products due to the personalized nature of skincare routines and their impact on self-confidence (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Skintific's strategic approach in offering aesthetic product packaging, interactive online campaigns, and personalized skincare solutions may have contributed to its strong customer retention.

The stronger influence of product quality on customer loyalty reinforces the notion that consumer trust in a product's effectiveness is a critical determinant of repeat purchases (Zeithaml, 1988; Fornell et al., 1996). Consumers tend to remain loyal to brands that consistently deliver safe, effective, and high-performing skincare solutions. This finding supports prior studies indicating that product quality serves as the foundation for consumer retention, as it ensures long-term satisfaction and minimizes the likelihood of brand switching (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Additionally, skincare consumers are highly selective, preferring brands that use scientifically backed formulations and high-quality ingredients (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehn, 2017). Skintific's adoption of Trilogy Triangle Effect technology, which enhances skin barrier protection, likely contributed to the perception of superior product quality, strengthening customer commitment.

The results suggest that while a positive brand experience enhances engagement, the perceived efficacy and reliability of the product ultimately secure consumer trust (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Verhoef et al., 2009). This aligns with research arguing that experiential marketing can attract new customers, but consistent product performance is what sustains long-term consumer relationships (Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003; Kumar & Shah, 2004). The synergy between these two factors suggests that a consumer who has a positive brand interaction but finds the product ineffective may not remain loyal, while an effective product with a poor brand experience may also struggle to retain consumers. Therefore, a balanced approach integrating experiential and product-driven strategies is essential for fostering long-term brand commitment.

These insights are particularly relevant for Skintific and other skincare brands operating in highly competitive markets. To sustain and enhance customer loyalty, brands should focus on both experiential engagement and product innovation. Enhancing customer experience through personalized recommendations, seamless purchasing processes, and engaging brand storytelling can strengthen consumer attachment (Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009). Simultaneously, maintaining high product quality through rigorous research and development, dermatological testing, and transparent ingredient sourcing is essential for fostering trust (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Oliver, 1999). These insights contribute to the broader discourse on consumer behavior in the beauty industry, offering practical recommendations for marketers seeking to cultivate a loyal customer base in an evolving marketplace.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that customer experience and product quality play significant roles in shaping customer loyalty toward Skintific beauty products in Kolaka Regency. While positive brand interactions enhance consumer engagement, the perceived efficacy and reliability of the product remain the key drivers of long-term loyalty. The findings suggest that Skintific's strategic focus on high-quality formulations, innovative skincare technology, and engaging brand experiences has contributed to its strong market position. To sustain consumer trust and encourage repeat purchases, skincare brands must balance experiential marketing with product excellence.

Future research could explore additional factors influencing customer loyalty, such as pricing strategies, brand reputation, and social influence. Investigating how digital marketing trends, sustainability initiatives, and personalized skincare solutions impact consumer behavior could provide deeper insights into evolving customer preferences. Moreover, comparative studies across different demographic segments or geographic regions may offer a broader perspective on loyalty determinants in the beauty industry.

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