

BEYOND SERVICE QUALITY: TRUST-BASED LOYALTY IN BEAUTY CLINIC SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty has become a critical issue in beauty clinic services, where customers evaluate not only service performance but also the credibility, safety, and trustworthiness of the provider. This study examines the effects of service quality and customer trust on customer loyalty among beauty clinic customers in Kendari, Indonesia. Drawing on service quality theory and relationship marketing theory, this study positions service quality as a functional evaluation mechanism and customer trust as a relational confidence mechanism in explaining customer loyalty. A quantitative survey was conducted involving 77 beauty clinic customers, and the data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings show that both service quality and customer trust positively contribute to customer loyalty. Customer trust has a stronger effect than service quality, indicating that loyalty in beauty clinic services is shaped more by customers' confidence in the clinic's competence, honesty, safety, and care orientation than by service performance alone. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending service marketing literature by demonstrating that customer loyalty in risk-sensitive and experience-based services is better explained through the integration of functional service evaluation and relational trust. Practically, the findings suggest that beauty clinic managers should strengthen customer retention strategies by improving service quality while prioritizing transparent communication, professional competence, safe procedures, and consistent trust-building practices.

Keywords: *Beauty Clinic Services; Customer Loyalty; Customer Trust; Service Quality; Relationship Marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of beauty clinic services has intensified competition among service providers, making customer loyalty a strategic issue in the contemporary service marketing landscape. In many service industries, loyalty is no longer shaped only by functional service delivery but also by the customer's cumulative evaluation of reliability, safety, value, satisfaction, and relational confidence in the provider. This issue becomes more critical in beauty clinic services because customers do not merely purchase a routine service; they engage in treatments that are closely related to personal appearance, self-confidence, perceived health risk, and long-term relationship with the clinic. Previous studies across healthcare, banking,

mobile commerce, retail, and digital services have consistently shown that loyalty is an important outcome of service quality, customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand image, and trust ((Huang et al., 2024; Islam, 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Uzir et al., 2021)

In beauty clinic services, customers evaluate not only tangible aspects such as facilities, cleanliness, and service environment, but also the competence of service personnel, the clarity of treatment information, the perceived safety of procedures, and the credibility of the clinic. These dimensions are important because aesthetic and beauty-related services involve higher perceived risk than many ordinary service encounters, especially when customers must trust the provider's expertise before experiencing the final treatment outcome. Recent service marketing studies indicate that service quality remains a key antecedent of customer satisfaction and loyalty because customers tend to remain loyal when services are delivered reliably, responsively, safely, and consistently with their expectations (Balinado et al., 2021; Kalia et al., 2021; Marcos & Coelho, 2022; Omar et al., 2021; Restuputri et al., 2021; Slack et al., 2021; Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2021). Therefore, in the context of beauty clinics, service quality can be understood as a customer's assessment of whether the clinic provides clean facilities, reliable treatment processes, responsive staff, and assurance during service delivery.

Beyond service quality, customer trust has become increasingly central in explaining loyalty in risk-sensitive service contexts. Trust reflects the customer's belief that the service provider is competent, honest, safe, and concerned with the customer's interests. This construct is especially relevant for beauty clinic customers because treatment decisions often require confidence in the clinic's professional competence, transparency of information, safety of products and equipment, and ethical communication regarding treatment benefits and risks. Prior studies have shown that trust strengthens customer loyalty by reducing perceived uncertainty and increasing confidence in future interactions with the service provider (Jadidi et al., 2022; Jafri et al., 2024; Mansouri et al., 2022; Mayayise, 2024; Mofokeng, 2023; Nosi et al., 2022; Shie et al., 2022). In this regard, trust may be more decisive than service quality alone because customers may perceive a service as good but still hesitate to remain loyal if they are uncertain about the provider's honesty, safety standards, and professional responsibility.

The state-of-the-art in service marketing shows a clear shift from viewing customer loyalty as a simple consequence of service performance toward understanding it as a multidimensional relational outcome shaped by service quality, trust, satisfaction, perceived value, customer experience, brand image, ethical behavior, and digital engagement. Studies in banking, e-commerce, healthcare, logistics, mobile social media, online shopping, and home delivery services have demonstrated that customer loyalty is commonly produced through the interaction between functional service evaluation and relational confidence in the provider (Chuenban et al., 2021; Juwaini et al., 2022; Mwiya et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Sasono et al., 2021; Yesitadewi & Widodo, 2024). However, existing studies

have more frequently examined these relationships in banking, healthcare, retail, digital commerce, and technology-mediated services, while empirical evidence focusing specifically on beauty clinic customers remains relatively limited. This gap is important because beauty clinic services combine characteristics of healthcare, personal care, and experiential consumption, making loyalty formation potentially different from that in ordinary service sectors.

Accordingly, this study addresses the empirical gap by examining the direct effects of service quality and customer trust on customer loyalty among beauty clinic customers in Kendari using survey data from 77 respondents and SEM-PLS 4. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on beauty clinic services in an emerging local market, where customer loyalty is examined through two theoretically relevant but practically distinct drivers: service quality as a functional service evaluation and customer trust as a relational confidence mechanism. By integrating these two predictors in a concise structural model, this study contributes to service marketing literature by clarifying whether loyalty in beauty clinic services is more strongly shaped by perceived service performance or by customers' trust in the clinic's competence, honesty, safety, and care orientation. Practically, the findings are expected to help beauty clinic managers design more effective customer retention strategies that move beyond physical service improvement toward trust-building practices, transparent communication, professional treatment standards, and consistent service delivery.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the integration of service quality theory and relationship marketing theory. Service quality theory explains that customer evaluation of a service is formed through perceived performance across tangible and intangible dimensions, including physical evidence, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In beauty clinic services, these dimensions are highly relevant because customers evaluate not only the visible service environment but also the reliability of treatment delivery, staff responsiveness, professional assurance, and perceived safety during the service encounter. Recent service marketing studies confirm that service quality remains a critical mechanism for shaping customer satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty across healthcare, banking, mobile commerce, home delivery, and digital services (Kalia et al., 2021; Marcos & Coelho, 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Omar et al., 2021; Salamah et al., 2022; Uzir et al., 2021; Yum & Yoo, 2023).

However, service quality alone may not fully explain loyalty in high-involvement and risk-sensitive services such as beauty clinics. Relationship marketing theory, particularly the commitment–trust perspective, argues that long-term customer relationships are sustained when customers believe that the provider is reliable, competent, honest, and committed to their interests (McNaughton et al., 2021). This theoretical logic is especially important in beauty

clinic services because customers often face uncertainty regarding treatment outcomes, product safety, staff competence, and the credibility of information provided by the clinic. Therefore, customer trust functions as a relational confidence mechanism that reduces perceived risk and encourages customers to maintain a long-term relationship with the service provider (Huang et al., 2024; Liu, 2025; Mofokeng, 2023; Shie et al., 2022). Based on these theoretical foundations, this study positions customer loyalty as the behavioral and relational outcome of two distinct but complementary drivers: service quality as a functional evaluation mechanism and customer trust as a relational confidence mechanism.

Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Service quality refers to customers' perception of how well a service provider delivers services that meet or exceed their expectations. In this study, service quality is reflected through four indicators: tangible evidence, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. In the context of beauty clinic services, tangible evidence refers to the cleanliness, comfort, and hygiene of facilities and equipment; reliability reflects the clinic's ability to deliver services consistent with the information provided; responsiveness refers to the speed and willingness of staff to address customer needs or complaints; and assurance reflects customers' perception of staff competence and safety during treatment. These indicators are theoretically relevant because beauty clinic customers evaluate service performance not only from the final treatment result but also from the whole service process, including consultation, information delivery, treatment implementation, and post-service confidence.

From a service quality perspective, customers are more likely to become loyal when they perceive the service provider as consistent, responsive, competent, and able to reduce uncertainty during service delivery. Prior empirical studies support this theoretical argument by showing that service quality has a positive effect on loyalty either directly or indirectly through satisfaction, perceived value, and trust (Balinado et al., 2021; Kalia et al., 2021; Marcos & Coelho, 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Uzir et al., 2021). In beauty clinic services, this relationship is expected to be particularly meaningful because customers who perceive the clinic as clean, reliable, responsive, and professionally assuring are more likely to return, recommend the clinic to others, and maintain their preference despite competing offers. Therefore, service quality is expected to strengthen customer loyalty.

H1. Service quality has a positive effect on customer loyalty in beauty clinic services.

Customer Trust and Customer Loyalty

Customer trust refers to customers' confidence that the service provider is competent, honest, safe, and concerned with customer needs. In this study, customer trust is measured through four indicators: competence, honesty, security, and benevolence. Competence reflects customers' belief that the clinic has

professional service personnel capable of providing appropriate beauty treatment solutions. Honesty refers to transparent communication regarding service procedures, prices, benefits, and potential risks. Security reflects customers' confidence in the safety of procedures, products, and equipment used by the clinic. Benevolence captures the perception that the clinic cares about customer comfort and provides services according to customer needs rather than merely pursuing profit.

Theoretically, trust is central to loyalty because it reduces perceived risk, strengthens confidence in future service encounters, and encourages customers to maintain a long-term relationship with the provider. This logic is consistent with relationship marketing theory, which views trust as a key condition for sustaining relational exchange (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In beauty clinic services, trust may be even more decisive than ordinary service evaluation because customers make decisions involving appearance, self-confidence, skin condition, treatment safety, and possible side effects. Empirical studies in healthcare, online shopping, digital services, mobile commerce, and financial technology consistently show that trust strengthens loyalty, repurchase intention, and relationship continuity (Huang et al., 2024; Jadil et al., 2022; Jafri et al., 2024; Liu, 2025; Mayayise, 2024; Mofokeng, 2023). Thus, customers who trust the competence, honesty, safety, and care orientation of a beauty clinic are more likely to revisit, recommend, and remain loyal to the clinic.

H2. Customer trust has a positive effect on customer loyalty in beauty clinic services.

Customer Loyalty in Beauty Clinic Services

Customer loyalty represents customers' intention to continue using a service, recommend it to others, prefer it over competitors, and resist switching to alternative providers. In this study, customer loyalty is reflected through repurchase intention, recommendation, preference, and resistance to switching. These indicators are consistent with loyalty theory, which suggests that loyalty involves both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions, including positive preference, repeat patronage, advocacy, and commitment to maintaining a relationship with the provider (Oliver, 1999). In beauty clinic services, loyalty is not merely a transactional outcome but a relational consequence of customers' accumulated experience and confidence in the clinic. A customer may perceive the clinic as attractive due to its facilities or promotions, but long-term loyalty is more likely to emerge when customers consistently perceive high service quality and develop strong trust in the clinic's professionalism and safety standards.

Accordingly, this study proposes that service quality and customer trust are two theoretically distinct but complementary antecedents of customer loyalty. Service quality explains loyalty through the functional evaluation of service performance, while customer trust explains loyalty through relational confidence and perceived risk reduction. This distinction is important because beauty clinic services combine characteristics of personal care, healthcare-related risk, and

experiential consumption. Therefore, examining these two predictors simultaneously provides a more focused explanation of how loyalty is formed in beauty clinic services, particularly in an emerging local market

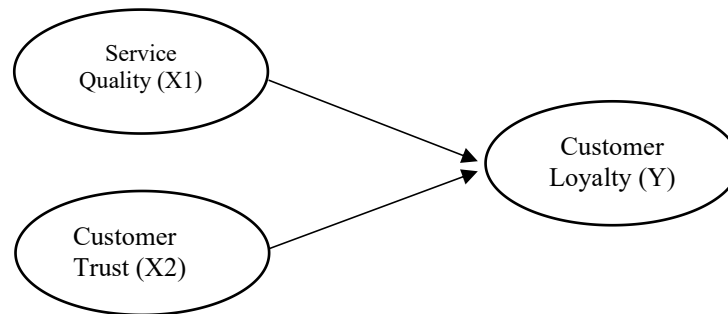


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design to examine the effects of service quality and customer trust on customer loyalty in beauty clinic services. The research was conducted among beauty clinic customers in Kendari, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was used, with respondents selected based on their experience in using beauty clinic services and their ability to evaluate the service received. A total of 77 valid responses were analyzed.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Service quality was measured through four indicators: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. Customer trust was measured through competence, honesty, security, and benevolence. Customer loyalty was measured through repurchase intention, recommendation, preference, and resistance to switching. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with SmartPLS 4. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was assessed using R-square, path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values through the bootstrapping procedure. The proposed model tested two direct relationships: service quality toward customer loyalty and customer trust toward customer loyalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, composite reliability, and convergent validity. The

results are presented in Table 1. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. Most indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators adequately represented their respective latent constructs. One indicator of service quality, SQ1, showed a slightly lower loading of 0.690. However, this value was close to the recommended threshold and was retained because the construct-level reliability and convergent validity values remained satisfactory (N. Hair et al., 2023).

Table 1. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Indicator Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE	
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.803	0.876	0.882	0.915	0.730
	CL2	0.912				
	CL3	0.809				
	CL4	0.888				
Customer Trust	CT1	0.886	0.884	0.893	0.919	0.741
	CT2	0.863				
	CT3	0.847				
	CT4	0.845				
Service Quality	SQ1	0.690	0.879	0.929	0.914	0.729
	SQ2	0.897				
	SQ3	0.912				
	SQ4	0.897				

The internal consistency reliability of the constructs was confirmed, as Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.876 to 0.884. The rho_A values also exceeded 0.70, ranging from 0.882 to 0.929, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.914 to 0.919. These findings indicate that all constructs possessed adequate reliability. Furthermore, convergent validity was established because the average variance extracted values for all constructs were above 0.50, with values ranging from 0.729 to 0.741. Therefore, the indicators were considered appropriate for measuring customer loyalty, customer trust, and service quality (J. F. Hair et al., 2021).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 2, the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs. This result indicates that each construct was empirically distinct from the other constructs in the model.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	Customer Loyalty	Customer Trust	Service Quality
Customer Loyalty	0.855		
Customer Trust	0.357	0.861	
Service Quality	0.326	0.740	0.854

The highest correlation was found between customer trust and service quality at 0.740. However, this value remained lower than the square root of AVE for both customer trust and service quality. Thus, the discriminant validity requirement was satisfied, suggesting that customer trust, service quality, and customer loyalty represented conceptually and statistically distinct constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

After establishing the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed by examining the coefficient of determination and path coefficients. The coefficient of determination is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Construct	R-square	R-square Adjusted
Customer Loyalty	0.136	0.113

The R-square value for customer loyalty was 0.136, while the adjusted R-square value was 0.113. This indicates that customer trust and service quality jointly explained 13.6% of the variance in customer loyalty. Although the explanatory power was relatively modest, the result suggests that both service-related and trust-related factors contributed to customer loyalty in the context of beauty clinic services.

Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4. The structural model showed positive relationships between the independent variables and customer loyalty.

Table 4. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t-statistics	p-value	Result
H1	Customer Trust → Customer Loyalty	0.256	0.260	0.171	1.501	0.033	Supported
H2	Service Quality → Customer Loyalty	0.137	0.155	0.189	0.723	0.047	Supported

Hypothesis Path	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t-statistics	p-value	Result
Customer Loyalty						

The effect of customer trust on customer loyalty was positive, with a path coefficient of 0.256. This finding indicates that higher customer trust tends to increase customer loyalty toward beauty clinic services. Based on the reported p-value of 0.033, the relationship was statistically significant. Therefore, H1 was supported.

Service quality also had a positive effect on customer loyalty, with a path coefficient of 0.137. This result suggests that better service quality is associated with stronger customer loyalty. Based on the reported p-value of 0.047, the relationship was statistically significant. Therefore, H2 was supported.

Compared with service quality, customer trust had a stronger direct effect on customer loyalty. This indicates that, in the beauty clinic service context, customers' confidence in the competence, honesty, safety, and care provided by the clinic may play a more dominant role in shaping loyalty than service quality alone.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the measurement model demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability in explaining customer loyalty in beauty clinic services. The high loadings of Customer Loyalty indicators suggest that loyalty in this context is primarily reflected in customers' intention to revisit, willingness to recommend, preference for the clinic, and resistance to switching. The strongest loading on CL2 indicates that repeat-visit intention is the most salient manifestation of loyalty among beauty clinic customers, which is consistent with service marketing studies showing that loyalty is strongly expressed through repurchase intention, recommendation behavior, and continuing relationship with the service provider ((Kalia et al., 2021; Salamah et al., 2022; Yum & Yoo, 2023). Similarly, the strong loadings of Customer Trust indicators confirm that customers' confidence in clinical competence, honesty of information, perceived safety, and care orientation represent the core foundation of trust. This is particularly relevant in beauty clinic services because customers face personal and appearance-related risks, making trust more critical than in low-risk service categories (Asraf, 2014; Huang et al., 2024; Mofokeng, 2023).

The results further show that Service Quality has a positive effect on Customer Loyalty, although its effect size is weaker than that of Customer Trust. This finding supports the logic that clean facilities, reliable service delivery, responsive staff, and service assurance contribute to customers' willingness to continue using beauty clinic services. The strongest service quality indicator was SQ3, indicating that customers place high importance on the clinic's ability to deliver services consistently with the information communicated before treatment. This suggests

that service reliability is more influential than physical appearance alone in shaping loyalty. The relatively lower loading of SQ1 implies that physical facilities remain important but are not the most dominant signal of quality in this study. This pattern is consistent with prior studies showing that service quality influences loyalty either directly or indirectly through satisfaction, perceived value, and trust across healthcare, digital banking, mobile commerce, and retail service settings ((Asraf et al., 2024; Lolemo & Pandya, 2025; Nguyen, 2020; Omar et al., 2021; Restuputri et al., 2021; Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2021; Uzir et al., 2021)

Customer Trust emerged as the stronger predictor of Customer Loyalty compared with Service Quality. This finding indicates that customers of beauty clinics are more likely to become loyal when they believe that the clinic is competent, honest, safe, and genuinely concerned about their needs. In high-involvement services such as beauty and aesthetic treatment, customers are not merely evaluating service convenience but also assessing the credibility and safety of the provider. Therefore, trust becomes a psychological mechanism that reduces perceived risk and strengthens the customer-provider relationship. This result aligns with studies showing that trust plays a central role in sustaining loyalty in healthcare, online services, e-commerce, and other risk-sensitive service contexts (Huang et al., 2024; Jadir et al., 2022; Jafri et al., 2024; Liu, 2025). In the context of beauty clinics, this means that customers may not remain loyal simply because the service is pleasant, but because they trust the clinic's professional judgment, product safety, treatment transparency, and ethical communication.

The Fornell-Larcker results confirm that Service Quality, Customer Trust, and Customer Loyalty are empirically distinct constructs, although the correlation between Service Quality and Customer Trust is relatively high. This suggests that customers may develop trust partly through repeated exposure to reliable, responsive, and safe service encounters. In other words, service quality does not only operate as a direct driver of loyalty but also functions as a trust-building signal. However, the R-square value of 0.136 indicates that Service Quality and Customer Trust jointly explain only 13.6% of the variance in Customer Loyalty. This modest explanatory power suggests that loyalty in beauty clinic services is likely influenced by other factors not included in the model, such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand image, price fairness, treatment results, social media engagement, customer experience, and electronic word-of-mouth. This interpretation is supported by recent studies showing that loyalty is often shaped by a broader set of cognitive, affective, relational, and experiential factors rather than service quality and trust alone ((Islam, 2022; Lolemo & Pandya, 2025; Mwiya et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Omar et al., 2021; Salamah et al., 2022).

Overall, this study contributes to service marketing literature by demonstrating that customer loyalty in beauty clinic services is more strongly driven by trust than by service quality alone. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the argument that in high-risk and experience-based services, loyalty is not merely a behavioral response to good service delivery but also a relational outcome formed

through perceived competence, honesty, safety, and care. Practically, beauty clinic managers should not limit loyalty strategies to improving facilities or service speed, but must strengthen trust-building practices through transparent consultation, accurate information about treatment benefits and risks, consistent service promises, hygienic procedures, professional staff competence, and ethical communication. Future studies are encouraged to extend this model by incorporating customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand image, treatment effectiveness, and social media marketing as additional predictors or mediating mechanisms to better explain customer loyalty in the beauty clinic industry (Jadil et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Uzir et al., 2021; Yum & Yoo, 2023)

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of service quality and customer trust on customer loyalty in beauty clinic services. Using SEM-PLS 4 with data from 77 respondents, the findings show that both service quality and customer trust positively contribute to customer loyalty. However, customer trust emerged as the stronger predictor, indicating that loyalty in beauty clinic services is shaped not only by reliable and responsive service delivery, but also by customers' confidence in the clinic's competence, honesty, safety, and care orientation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to service marketing literature by confirming that customer loyalty in risk-sensitive and experience-based services is better explained through the integration of service quality theory and relationship marketing theory. In the context of beauty clinics, trust functions as an important relational mechanism that reduces perceived risk and strengthens customers' willingness to revisit, recommend, and remain loyal to the clinic.

Practically, the findings suggest that beauty clinic managers should improve service quality while prioritizing trust-building strategies. Clinics need to provide transparent information, maintain hygienic and safe procedures, ensure staff competence, and deliver services consistently with customer expectations. Future studies may extend this model by including customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand image, treatment outcomes, price fairness, and customer experience to provide a more comprehensive explanation of customer loyalty.

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