

Positive determinants word-of-mouth of supermarket consumer in the COVID-19 pandemic era

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Abstract

This research, which was conducted in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, aims to analyze the influence of the dimensions of service quality, competitive prices, customer satisfaction toward the positive word-of-mouth of Supermarket customers. Questionnaires were distributed to 350 respondents as samples using the *non-probability sampling method* and *purposive sampling technique*. Meanwhile, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used to analyze the data. The results of the study indicate that *Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, Responsiveness, Competitive Price* have positive and significant effects on *Customer Satisfaction*, which in turn would have a positive impact on positive word-of-mouth. Of all dimensions of service quality, the most powerful factor influencing consumer satisfaction shopping in supermarkets is reliability, and the one that gives consumers the most important feeling in providing quality services is Responsiveness. For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of research in various types of businesses, not only in supermarkets.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic era; supermarket; service quality; competitive prices; customer satisfaction; positive word-of-mouth.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a retail investment destination ranked 15th among developing countries according to A.T. Kearney's 2014 Global Retail Development Index™ (GRDI). This is driven by economic developments that have led to the distribution of modern retails (*Minimarkets, Supermarkets, Department stores, Hypermarkets*) which widely

spread in Indonesia with 45,000 outlets in 2019 (Purwanto, 2021). According to the Indonesian Retail Entrepreneurs Association (Aprindo) data, modern retail sales have continued to boost from 2016 to reach IDR 205 trillion, 2017 IDR 212 trillion, 2018 IDR 233 trillion, and in 2019 amounting to IDR 270 trillion (Richard, 2019).

Supermarket is a modern retail which has become the preference of lots of consumers as a place to shop until now. This can be noticed from the growth of supermarkets in Indonesia, wherein 2018, the distribution of supermarket outlets in Indonesia was 1,131; increased by 1,279 in 2019, and reached 1,484 stores in 2020 spread over 635 sub-districts and 223 districts/cities (BPS, 2020). Likewise, during the COVID-19 pandemic where there was a decline in business and economic activities in almost all business lines of a country, including the retail business, either national scale or local supermarkets were more resistant to the crisis due to its adaptive nature and proximity to the community (Husaini, 2021). Therefore, every supermarket must have a competitive strategy in the market, especially in the crisis-era due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Competition depends on how the company deals with its consumers. Customer loyalty is the company's source to survive, grow and guarantee revenue (Marija, 2018). Customer loyalty can create a competitive advantage for the company, where the cost to serve loyal customers will be cheaper, less price-sensitive, and create positive word-of-mouth promotion (Lewis & Soureli, 2006). Companies should encourage consumers to be positive word-of-mouth for their products by providing good or positive recommendations to others through conversations, reviews, giving opinions and information about the company's products, services, or brands (Riorini & Widayati, 2018; Husin et al., 2016).

Customer satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure or disappointment that is felt by someone by comparing expectation and performance or perceived results, where the product consumed by the customer goes beyond their expectations (Candan, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2016). Customer satisfaction is the basis for creating a relationship between consumers and companies, based on the customer experience after consuming the product (Lau et al, 2011). Customer satisfaction will encourage customers to be more dedicated therefore they intend to repurchase more and carry out positive word-of-mouth (Casidy & Wymer, 2015; Slack et al., 2020). Positive word-of-mouth can be beneficial for convincing potential consumers to believe, purchase products, or consume company products (Shirkhodaie & Rastgoo-deylami, 2016). Satisfied customers are more likely to give positive word-of-mouth about the company (Agha et al., 2017).

In an increasingly fierce competition, every company must provide excellent service quality hence to create high customer satisfaction (Amin et al., 2013). Customer satisfaction could be a long-term competitive advantage for companies because it boosts value by creating disparities between one company and another in coping with the competition (Ojo, 2010). Service quality is the totality of the features and characteristics contained in a product or service that can determine customer satisfaction in meeting their necessities and desires (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Consumers in assessing the level of service quality provided by the company can use factors classified into five SERVQUAL dimensions, namely: tangible, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Mauri et al., 2013). Tangible is a form of actual

physical actualization that can be observed or utilized in accordance with perceived benefits, which include physical facilities, equipment visible to customers, the appearance of personnel, and attractive interiors. Empathy is a form of attention, sincerity, sympathy, consideration, and employee involvement by providing services that are appropriate and acceptable to customers. Empathy refers to giving attention and care to individual customers. Reliability is the provision of services in conformity with what is promised, credibility and accuracy. Responsiveness refers to the ability of employees to provide promising and responsive services punctually when customers request something. While Assurance relates to the method to increase the sense of security for the services provided so that customers are convinced that they are important for service providers (Ehsani & Ehsani, 2015; Jayanti, A, N., & Djumiarti, 2016; Kitapci et al., 2014).

Service quality and customer satisfaction have a close relationship, where service quality is associated with providing services to customers, and customer satisfaction is the result of experience gained from the services received (Malik, 2012). The provision of service quality is a prerequisite and determinant of customer satisfaction (Kitapci et al., 2013), and will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2016). According to Nguyen et al., (2018). Tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and reliability have important roles to improve customer satisfaction. When the services provided are more tangible, empathetic, reliable, responsive, and assurance, they will lead to increased customer satisfaction (Slack et al., 2020).

The increasingly fierce competition requires every company to be more cautious in designing competitive prices strategies. Competitive prices are a process to design and set strategic prices to benefit from the products sold by the company based on the market relative to the competition. Companies that sell products with relatively the same attributes as their competitors often apply competitive prices (Carillo, 2019).

Price has a very enormous influence on the level of consumer satisfaction since fair price for a product will satisfy the consumers. If the company sets a price that is aligned with the perceived benefits from the products they consume, consumers will feel satisfied (Gulla et al., 2015). Conversely, if the company sets a price that is not aligned with the benefits obtained by consumers, then customer satisfaction will reduce (Adi & Yoestini, 2012). Therefore, the more competitive the price in the market, the higher the consumer satisfaction (Almohaimmed, 2017; Haghighi et al., 2012).

Positive word-of-mouth is an effective marketing communication strategy because it is conveyed by consumers who have benefited from the product by providing reviews, opinions, recommendation, and information to other consumers (Husin et al., 2016). Customer satisfaction drives consumers to be more devoted (Agha et al., 2017; Casidy & Wymer, 2015). Consumers who are satisfied with the company's products or services are more likely to become devoted customers, repurchase, provide positive word-of-mouth promotions and reduce price sensitivity (Agha et al., 2017). In an increasingly fierce competition, creating high customer satisfaction is important for marketers since this will ultimately encourage consumers to do positive word-of-mouth (Amin & Fontaine, 2013).



Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

METHOD

Based on the purpose of the study, this research is a hypothesis-testing research with a supermarket in Jakarta as the unit of analysis. The variables studied were measured by several statement items adapted from Slack et al., (2020) and Febryanto & Bernarto (2018), using a sizing technique of *five-point Likert scales*, where (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree.

In this study, the type of data collected based on the time of its collection is *cross-sectional data*, where the data were collected during June 2021. To get the data, a questionnaire was distributed using Google form to 350 respondents who were selected using the Purposive sampling technique. Before being distributed, the questionnaire as a data collection tool was initially tested using the Validity and Reliability Test to ensure that the data collection tool used was good. The method used in the validity test is *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*, with the decision criteria by looking at the value of factor loading on the *Structural Equation Model (SEM)*, where the cut of *value factor loading* which is declared valid is more than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the Reliability Test uses the Internal Consistency Reliability method, where the decision-making criteria is by looking at *the Cronbach's Alpha* value which is greater than 0.6 therefore it is declared reliable (construct reliable). From the results obtained, it can be known that the system of each statement item used to measure the variable has a factor loading value ranging from 0.753 to 0.925 and is declared valid. While the Cronbach's Alpha value for each of the variables studied was obtained a value of more than 0.70 which ranged from 0.819 to 0.886, so it can be said that all variables used were reliable and the questionnaire as a data collection tool was feasible to be used.

Table 1
Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable/ Dimension	Statement Item	Factor Loading Value	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Service Quality</i>			
Reliability	Promises given by supermarkets are fulfilled within the agreed timeframe	0.825	0.857
	When there is a problem, supermarket employees show interest in assisting to solve	0.853	
	Supermarket employees provide proper service	0.874	
	Supermarkets always provide the promised products	0.898	
Assurance	Supermarket employees provide accurate service	0.857	0.869
	Supermarket employee behavior is convincing	0.753	
	Buying at this supermarket makes self-confident	0.844	
	Supermarket employees are polite	0.850	
Tangibles	Supermarket employees have sufficient knowledge	0.879	0.884
	Supermarket using modern equipment	0.844	
	Supermarket interiors are visually appealing	0.872	
	Supermarket employees are well-dressed and neat	0.898	
Empathy	Supermarket is clean and products are easy to be found	0.925	0.886
	Supermarket employees give personal attention	0.864	
	Supermarket operating hours as promised	0.856	
	The service in this supermarket is provided personally	0.856	
	Meeting needs is a priority for the services provided by this supermarket	0.879	
	Supermarket employees understand my needs	0.905	
	Supermarket employees always provide product information that I request	0.827	

Variable/ Dimension	Statement Item	Factor Loading Value	Cronbach's Alpha
	Supermarket employees always provide prompt service	0.912	
	Supermarket employees always desire to help	0.890	
	Supermarket employees are always willing to answer questions	0.878	
	The price of the product offered is acceptable	0.779	
	Product prices in this supermarket can compete with competitors	0.879	
Competitive prices	The price offered is in line with the benefits of the product obtained	0.864	0.878
	The price of the product listed is rational and affordable	0.871	
Customer satisfaction	Based on the overall shopping experience at the supermarket, I am very satisfied	0.853	0.819
	Shopping at this supermarket is an amazing experience	0.890	
	Shopping at this supermarket is so much fun	0.865	
Positive word-of-mouth	I recommend to family and friends to shop at this supermarket	0.866	0.862

Source: Data Processing

Furthermore, questionnaires were distributed to 214 respondents using the *purposive sampling* technique. The criteria for the respondents examined were supermarket customers in Jakarta who made direct purchases to the store at least 2 times in the last six months. From the data collected, a description of the characteristics of the respondents is obtained as follows: (a) the majority of respondents are women who have made purchases in the last 6 months directly to supermarkets 3 to 5 times, aged between 31 to 41.9 years, last education of undergraduate, current occupation as employees, and monthly income of between IDR 5,000,001 up to IDR 15,000,000 (b) the minority of respondents are male who make direct purchases to supermarkets for more than 5 times in the last 6 months, < 30.9 years old, last education of doctoral level, current job as state civil apparatus, and monthly income between \leq IDR 5,000,000

The data obtained are analyzed using the statistical data analysis method of *Structural Equation Model* (SEM) and the help of the AMOS 22 software. Before the proposed hypothesis is analyzed, the requirements for the *Goodness of fit model* must

initially be fulfilled to ensure that the proposed model is fit. From various types of measurements (*Absolute fit measures, Incremental fit measures, and Parsimonious fit measures*) the results show that all measurements have the required cut-off value so that the proposed model can be said to be fit.

Table 2
Goodness Test Results of Fit Model

Type Measurement	Measurement	Result	Target Match Rate	Conclusion
Absolute fit measures	ECVI	Independence ECVI=276.922 Saturated ECVI=6.713 Model ECVI=4,064	Closer to the Saturated value compared to independent indicates good fit	Good Fit
	RMR	RMR = 0,022	RMR ≤ 0,05	Good Fit
Incremental fit measures	IFI	IFI=0.872	The closer the value to 1, the better IFI ≥ 0.9 is good fit, while 0.08 < IFI < 0.90 is marginal fit	Marginal Fit
	CFI	CFI=0,970	The closer the value to 1, the better CFI ≥ 0.9 is good fit, while 0.08 < CFI < 0.90 is marginal fit	Good Fit
Parsimonious fit measure	AIC	Independence AIC=276.922 Saturated AIC=756,092 Model AIC=865,656	Closer to the Saturated value compared to independent indicates good fit	Good Fit
	CAIC	Independence CAIC=797.542 Saturated CAIC=289.662 Model CAIC=198,398	Closer to the Saturated value compared to independent indicates good fit	Good Fit

Source: Data Processing Results

Catatan: ECVI=Expected Cross Validation Index; RMR=Root Mean Square Residual; IFI=Incremental Fit Index; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; AIC=Akaike Information Criterion; CAIC=Consistent Akaike Information Criterion

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

From the results of data processing, an overview of the variables studied based on the mean and standard deviation was obtained. Although consumers prefer to shop at minimarkets or online during the COVID-19 pandemic era (Husaini, 2021), supermarkets can still compete and become consumers' choices for shopping. It can be seen that in the Covid 19 pandemic era, consumers are still concerned about the service quality provided by supermarkets which will have an impact on their satisfaction.

Overall, with a mean service quality value of 4,352, it explains that consumers feel that the supermarkets they visit: utilize modern/ contemporary equipment, have employees who behave politely, possess a responsive attitude, provide appropriate and accurate services, and give individual attention to customers. Furthermore, the mean value obtained from competitive prices is 4,538, which means that the price of products in supermarkets is perceived by consumers as acceptable, rational, affordable, and competitive. Furthermore, the mean customer satisfaction value is 4,394 which describes that supermarket consumers feel delighted and satisfied shopping at supermarkets, due to beyond expectation shopping experience they obtain. The mean of positive word-of-mouth value obtained is 4,562 depicting which consumers will recommend to their family and friends to shop at the supermarket.

From all the variables studied (Service quality, Competitive prices, Customer satisfaction, and Positive word-of-mouth) standard deviation values obtained are 0.534; 0.424; 0.643; and 0.533, which mean that the standard deviation value tends to be minor, and the data collected for each variable of Service quality, Competitive prices, Customer satisfaction and Positive word-of-mouth tend to be concentrated, so it can be concluded that the data collected is stable or consistent.

After the research model is tested and the model fit/ goodness test of fit model is obtained, the next stage is Hypothesis Testing. All hypotheses proposed and tested are directional hypotheses, where the hypothesis is tested by a one-tailed test.

Hypothesis test decision making is carried out by comparing the *p-value* with a *significant level* of 5%. Hypothesis is supported if *p-value* with *significant level* of $\leq 5\%$ and not supported if *p-value* > 0.05 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Furthermore, the results of the hypothesis test (Table 3) show that all hypothesis H_0 are rejected and H_a are supported since the *p-value* of each hypothesis is $\leq 5\%$.

Table 3
Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Standardized regression weights	<i>p-value</i>	Decision
H_{11} : There is a positive influence of reliability toward customer satisfaction	0.564	0.032	H_1 Supported

Hypothesis	Standardized regression weights	p-value	Decision
H ₂ : There is a positive influence of assurance toward customer satisfaction	0.429	0.000	H ₂ Supported
H ₃ : There is a positive influence of tangible toward customer satisfaction	0.378	0.002	H ₃ Supported
H ₄ : There is a positive influence of empathy toward customer satisfaction	0.521	0,000	H ₄ Supported
H ₅ : There is a positive influence of responsiveness toward customer satisfaction	0.472	0,018	H ₅ Supported
H ₆ : There is a positive influence of competitive prices toward customer satisfaction	0.641	0.000	H ₆ Supported
H ₇ : There is a positive influence of customer satisfaction toward positive word-of-mouth	0.519	0,000	H ₇ Supported

Source: Data Processing Results

The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that there is a positive effect of *Reliability* toward *Customer Satisfaction*. This means that the more supermarket employees fulfill their promises, show a genuine interest in solving problems, provide appropriate service, promised products, and accurate records of all consumer purchases, the greater satisfaction, pleasure, and good experience that supermarkets consumers will obtain. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies from Almohaimmed (2017); Bailia et al., (2014); Haghghi et al., (2012); Slack et al., (2020) where the dimensions of Service Quality have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This is supported by Parasuraman et al., (1988) who suggested that reliability is the most important factor in all services. The results of previous studies also showed that consumers desire the service providers to fulfill their promises accurately and reliably, and provide consistent results (Nawaz & Hassan, 2016).

The results of the second hypothesis testing reveal a positive effect of *Assurance* toward Customer Satisfaction. If customers are increasingly convinced that supermarket employees have good behavior, polite attitude, and sufficient knowledge, then they will feel more satisfied, happy and gain a beyond expectations experience. Khan & Fasih (2014) explained that consumers feel more confident and secure in making transactions if employees have professional and ethical attitudes and behavior.

Furthermore, the results of the third hypothesis testing disclose a positive effect of *Tangibles* on *Customer Satisfaction*, where customers sense that supermarkets have increasingly modern equipment, attractive interiors, well-dressed employees, clean and

organized environment in order that consumers feel more satisfied and bring about a pleasant experience. Tangibles are an important factor in service delivery since it will create positive and strong consumer associations and emotional experiences through proprietary assets (Naidoo, 2014).

The fourth hypothesis to test the positive effect of *Empathy* toward *customer satisfaction* is also observed to have a positive and significant effect. This explains that supermarket employees have given more attention and recognized consumer needs so that consumers are more satisfied, pleased, and have surprising experiences. Ganguli & Roy (2011) said that without empathy, consumers will feel disappointed with the service quality provided by the company. Empathy creates an emotional relationship between service providers and customers and encourages consumers to maintain their long-term relationship with the company (Wieseke, et al., 2012).

On the fifth dimension of Service Quality, a positive effect of *Responsiveness* toward *customer satisfaction* is found as result of the hypothesis. From the results of the study, it was found that consumers feel that employees always provide the information requested, fast service, and are always eager to assist consumers, thus causing feelings of being more enjoyable, satisfied and providing a beyond expectation shopping experience. This explains that supermarkets are very committed in providing services to their consumers, as stated by Nguyen (2016), that responsiveness describes the company's commitment to providing timely manner services to consumers.

The six-hypothesis test regarding the positive effect of *Competitive prices* on *Customer satisfaction* reveals a significant effect. This means that consumers perceive the prices of products offered in supermarkets to be competitive, acceptable, affordable and in line with the benefits obtained, thereby causing feelings of more satisfactions, pleasure and can create beyond expectation experiences. This is in line with the opinion of Febryanto & Bernarto (2018) who state that if the price set by the company does not match with the benefits of the product that will be received by consumers, it will reduce consumer satisfaction.

The seven-hypothesis test result also reveals a positive influence of *customer satisfaction* toward *positive word-of-mouth*, where consumers sense more satisfaction and happiness to shop at supermarkets, create a beyond expectations shopping experience, and finally, these will encourage them to recommend to their families and friends to shop at the supermarket. This is in line with what was said by Egbunike & Okoye (2017), if the company delivers value to consumers and succeeds to turn them into satisfaction, afterward consumers intend to share their experiences with family and friends or create *positive word-of-mouth* of the services company. *Positive word-of-mouth* is needed by marketers to understand what motivates customers to share brand information content with other customers through social media platforms since this will affect customer preference of a product (Yaylí & Bayram, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that in the Covid 19 pandemic era, supermarkets still have a great opportunity to be developed due to a lot of customers who still prefer to shop directly at stores. This is also an opportunity for

supermarkets to create customer loyalty. Positive word-of-mouth is a current marketing communication strategy that can create customer loyalty for the company.

From the results of the study, it was concluded that the determinants of word-of-mouth in the supermarkets during the COVID-19 pandemic era were: (a) service quality and its dimensions (Reliability, Assurance, Tangible, Empathy, Responsiveness), (b) Competitive prices, and (c) Customer satisfaction. In addition, it was also found that: (a) Competitive prices are the most powerful factor influencing consumer satisfaction when shopping at supermarkets. (b) From all dimensions of service quality, the most powerful factor influencing consumer satisfaction shopping at supermarkets is reliability and the least strong is tangible. (c) In providing service quality, consumers feel that responsiveness is the most important factor. (d) Service quality and competitive prices will affect customer satisfaction which finally could encourage consumers to carry out positive word-of-mouth.

Based on the findings, some practical suggestions that can be given are: (a) to reward employees who have good performance, and to provide direction and sanctions to employees with poor performance to maintain the quality of supermarket employee behavior, (b) to make unique and convenient uniform designs for employees so that they could present well dressed and neat appearance in front of customers, (c) to provide alternative purchasing service programs to consumers by doing online shopping and safe online delivery, (d) to constantly control the supermarket's products to ensure the availability of products needed by consumers especially when facing fluctuating demand, (e) to provide a payment system through online payment methods for consumer safety.

While the theoretical advice that can be given is to apply further research on modern retail minimarkets due to their presence which could be easily reached by consumers.

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