ENHANCING BRAND LOYALTY AT UNIQLO: THE ROLE OF STORE ATTRIBUTES, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES, AND ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

There was a phenomenon of an increase in number of e-commerce users, mobile applications, and other digital technologies, most consumers still prefer to shop in offline stores for various reasons. The biggest factor for consumers choosing to shop offline, with the largest percentage of 62%, is the desire to physically inspect the goods. Retailers should enhance in-store experiences by implementing responsive and innovative store attributes. This research aims the impact of store attributes on brand loyalty, with customer engagement as mediating variables. Using a quantitative, causal-descriptive analysis, data was collected from 280 qualified respondents through purposive sampling. The study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis using Smart-PLS 3.0 software. Results indicate a positive and significant influence of merchandise, transaction convenience, loyalty program and customer engagement on brand loyalty. It also shows that customer experience and engagement mediate the relationship between store attributes and brand loyalty. The model explains 42% of the variance in Uniqlo's brand loyalty, which falls into the moderate category.

Keywords: Store Attributes, Customer Engagement, Brand Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the fashion trend has been a major focus worldwide, including in Indonesia. Fashion is not just clothing, but also part of a person's identity. The fashion trend in Indonesia has continued to evolve significantly. Indonesia itself has a fashion industry that is currently one of the sub-sectors of the creative economy sector that plays an important role in driving Indonesia's economy (Fikri et al., 2022). The number of jobs created by the fashion sector has reached 17 percent of the total 25 million jobs contributed by the creative economy sector. The largest contribution to export value in the creative economy sector is fashion, totaling 16.5 billion dollars in 2022 (Setiawan, 2024). In the context of the fashion industry, the retail industry plays a crucial role as a distribution channel for fashion products to end consumers. National modern retail turnover in 2019 is estimated to have grown by 10%, and the value of modern retail sales in 2019 reached a high figure of IDR 256 trillion (Richard, 2019).

In purchased preferences among Indonesian people tend to choose to shop for clothes, with the highest percentage reaching 76%. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed people's habits, resulting in them spending more time at home and opting for more casual and comfortable clothing. As a result, demand for casual clothing has increased significantly, benefiting retailers like Fast Retailing that offer such products. This can be

seen from the market capitalization achieved by Uniqlo, which reached USD 103 billion, surpassing Inditex, the parent company of the Zara brand (Berita Bisnis, 2021). With the Covid-19 pandemic bringing negative impacts to many sectors, this impact does not apply to the Japanese fashion retailer, Fast Retailing, which oversees the Uniqlo brand. In the fashion industry, the retail sector plays a crucial role as the distribution channel that delivers fashion products to end consumers. The fashion retail industry in Indonesia encompasses a wide range of stores, from small boutiques to department stores and large shopping malls. These retailers sell a variety of fashion products, including clothing, footwear, accessories, cosmetics, and beauty products. The fashion retail industry in Indonesia continues to grow in tandem with economic development and changing consumer lifestyles. In 2019, the annual turnover of modern retail was estimated to grow by 10%, with sales reaching a significant value of IDR 256 trillion (Richard, 2019).

The increasing presence of international fashion brands in Indonesia aligns with the perception that Indonesia is a highly promising market for the fashion industry. In recent years, many foreign retailers have opened their outlets in various shopping centers and malls across Indonesia. Uniqlo has established more physical stores than its competitors. Uniqlo began its expansion in Indonesia in 2013 and now operates a total of 74 stores nationwide. The growth in Indonesian purchasing power and the rising interest in high-quality international fashion products are key factors driving foreign retailers to invest in Indonesia (Soliha, 2008). Uniqlo's sales in Indonesia also show strong performance, as evidenced by the high rate of repeat purchases from loyal customers. In a survey of fifty Indonesian respondents, 90% stated that they had purchased Uniqlo products more than once, citing reasons such as product quality, strategic store locations (in major shopping centers), and a wide range of product options (Saraswati & Saputri, 2020).

In-store experience is a key strategy in communicating Uniqlo's brand. With spacious stores, bright lighting, organized shelves, and attractive layouts, Uniqlo creates a comfortable and welcoming shopping environment, reflecting its concept of simplicity and the importance of basic clothing (Martinroll, 2024). The management process of Uniqlo's physical stores involves stages of recruitment, training, and supervision of every customer interaction (D. Aaker, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to have store attributes that reflect the characteristics of an offline store. The implementation of responsive and innovative store attributes is a crucial part of providing high-quality services and enhancing competitiveness in the retail market (Salem & Alanadoly, 2024). Store atmosphere is a key factor that stores use to attract customers. Each store has a physical layout that can either facilitate or hinder shoppers' movement within the space. The store's appearance creates an ambiance tailored to its target market, which can entice customers to make purchases (Iskamto et al., 2023). Linggasari & Millanyani (2014) stated that store atmosphere simultaneously influences customer loyalty at Kopi Progo, Jalan Progo. Therefore, it can be concluded that the attributes of a fashion store are attractive to consumers to visit the store and create customer engagement. In this study, it refers to several dimensions studied by Singh et al. (2022) and Mohd-Ramly & Omar (2017), namely: merchandise (characteristics of the goods sold), communication with the staff (interaction with store personnel), store atmosphere (overall impression of the store environment), and transaction convenience (smoothness of the purchase process).

Customer engagement is considered a condition in which customers are involved, both directly and indirectly, in retailer marketing activities. Customer engagement in the marketing process can occur both directly through face-to-face interactions with producers and through online media such as social media (Chen et al., 2020). Customer engagement can also affect customer experiences (Al-Dmour et al., 2019; McLean & Wilson, 2019). Customer engagement can take the form of recommendations, customer interactions, blogging, writing reviews, and other beneficial activities for producers. First, Uniqlo interacts with customers through product reviews that help improve product quality. This demonstrates attention and absorption, where customers are focused and fully engaged in providing feedback for product improvements. Second, Uniqlo regularly hosts engaging events that align with its products, such as the UV Experience event showcasing their UV protection technology. During this event, customers can learn about Uniqlo's UV Protection Fabric at the Interactive UV Lab and receive free UV protection products with a minimum purchase. This reflects enthusiasm and interaction, where customers are excited and actively participate in the event. A strong relationship between the company and its customers, based on engagement, fosters loyalty, encouraging customers to consistently choose the company's products or services (Gupta et al., 2018). Creating robust customer engagement in the long term will result in customers continuously using the services offered by the company (Islam et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of store attributes on brand loyalty at Uniqlo, with customer engagement serving as a mediating variable. The study aims to understand how various dimensions of store attributes—merchandise, communication with staff, store atmosphere, and transaction convenience—influence brand loyalty and the role of customer engagement in this relationship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Store Attributes

Store attributes are consumer evaluations of the overall shopping experience at a store and reflect the attributes associated with that store (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). Store attributes can be defined as ambient conditions (such as non-visual factors like store atmosphere and comfort), design elements (such as visual characteristics like product quality), and social factors (such as human variables like retail employee attitudes) (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Store attributes can be considered the intentional design of the shopping environment aimed at creating specific emotional impacts on consumers, ultimately increasing the likelihood of making a purchase (Zhou & Wong, 2004). This study refers to several dimensions previously studied by Singh et al. (2022) and Mohd-Ramly & Omar (2017), namely: merchandise (characteristics of the goods sold), communication with the staff (interaction with store personnel), store atmosphere (overall impression of the store environment), and transaction convenience (smoothness of the purchase process).

2.2. Customer Engagement

Customer engagement can be described from a behavioral perspective, defining it as customers' actions towards products and services that go beyond purchasing, driven by motivational urges (van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2009). Customer engagement

involves communication or interaction between external stakeholders, such as customers, and producers or companies through various channels (Gupta et al., 2018; Islam & Rahman, 2016). This engagement in marketing processes can occur offline through direct interactions with producers or online via social media (Chen et al., 2020). (So et al., 2016) conceptualize customer engagement as a multi-dimensional construct comprising five key factors: enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification. Enthusiasm reflects excitement and strong interest in the brand. Attention describes the careful consideration and focus a consumer gives to the brand. Absorption is characterized by full concentration and deep involvement where time seems to pass quickly. Interaction refers to customer participation with the brand or other customers, both online and offline, beyond the act of purchasing. Identification is an individual's perception of unity or belonging with the brand. Collectively, these five dimensions reflect the psychological and behavioral aspects of customer engagement.

2.3. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is an assessment of the extent to which customers are committed to a brand. It involves consumers' habits of consistently choosing to purchase products from that brand over time (Aaker, 2013). This measure reflects the relative demand consumers have for a brand. Brand loyalty is crucial for a company, especially in the fashion industry, because once a person is loyal to a brand, they are likely to purchase any product that the company produces. Therefore, brand loyalty is related to consumers' preferences and attachment to a brand. This loyalty can arise from long-term use and the trust built from ongoing positive experiences with the brand's products (Ishak et al., 2015).

2.4. Previous Research

According to Mohd-Ramly & Omar (2017) demonstrated that customer engagement is related to the relationship and connection between customers and products or services. However, measurement methods and dimensions vary among researchers due to different perspectives and research focuses. Studies by van Doorn et al. (2010) and Verhoef et al. (2009) define customer engagement from a behavioral perspective, describing it as customer actions beyond product or service purchases, driven by motivation. Customer engagement in stores includes enthusiasm, social interaction, and active participation in store programs (Vivek et al., 2012). High levels of customer engagement indicate a strong relationship between customers and the store or brand (Islam & Rahman, 2016). Nguyen et al. (2014) also found that store attributes are part of customer engagement tactics. Based on previous research, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: Store Attributes has positive and significant impact to Customer Engagement

The hypothesis testing results conducted by Anggara et al. (2023) indicate that customer experience has a significantly positive effect on brand loyalty. According to Khan et al. (2020), customer experience is an important factor contributing positively to brand loyalty in stores. This means that when consumers have a valuable experience with a brand, they are likely to return to the store and show a high level of brand loyalty (Khan & Rahman, 2016). The study conducted by So et al. (2016b) demonstrated that customer engagement beyond the purchasing process significantly influences consumer loyalty

towards brands in the aviation and hotel industries. Based on previous research, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Customer Engagement has positive and significant effect on Brand loyalty

The study conducted by Nikhashemi et al. (2016) found that store attributes affect perceived value, which ultimately influences customer brand loyalty in the retail (hypermarket) industry among Malaysian customers. The findings revealed a significant relationship between store attributes and perceived value, both directly and indirectly affecting customer brand loyalty. Additionally, the study highlighted the crucial role of store attributes in enhancing customer perceived value. The correlation between store attributes and perceived value emphasizes the importance of a consistent positive experience for regular hypermarket customers, who begin to value aspects such as product variety and satisfactory services. This research will test both the direct and indirect effects of store attributes on brand loyalty. Based on these previous research findings, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3: Store Attributes has positive and significant effect on Brand loyalty

H4: Store Attributes has positive and significant effect on Brand loyalty mediated by customer engagement

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used purposive sampling technique with a quantitative methodology. The study was conducted through the distribution of online questionnaires using Google Forms. The survey employed Bahasa Indonesia and was aimed at Uniqlo consumers in Indonesia, successfully collecting 280 responses. The secondary data sources include journals, articles, online newspapers, books, conference papers, and other valid sources. SmartPLS version 3.0 software was used for data analysis. After the data was gathered, it was examined utilizing causal descriptive analysis approaches to provide insights into the correlations between variables without drawing wider conclusions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

The data collected through the questionnaires, which were distributed online, were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0. Each variable underwent construct validity assessment, specifically using convergent validity and discriminant validity, and hypotheses were tested.

4.1.1. Outer Models

Convergent validity in SEM-PLS was evaluated using outer loadings, with a rule of thumb score of >0.70 considered valid and indicating good convergent validity (Indrawati, 2015). In this study, the outer loading for the item CEG5, CEG 8, CEG9, CEG12, CEG13, CEG14, CEG15, CEG16 is below the threshold of 0.70. Consequently, the process of dropping this indicator was necessary to ensure that all indicators used were valid. After dropping the non-compliant indicator, the remaining outer loadings

were re-evaluated. It was concluded that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all >0.50, thus meeting the criteria for convergent validity. According to (Hair et al., 2016), an AVE value higher than 0.50 indicates that the items within a variable possess sufficient convergent validity. Additionally, constructs are considered to have high reliability if the Composite Reliability is >0.70, Cronbach's Alpha is >0.60, and rho_A is >0.70. In this study, all variables had Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values >0.70, demonstrating that each indicator for the variables exhibits good consistency and reliability.

Table 1. Measurement item of the study

Variables	Items	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Store Attributes	SA10	0.715	0.934	0.935	0.942	0.558
	SA12	0.749				
	SA13	0.737				
	SA14	0.738				
	SA15	0.729				
	SA16	0.784				
	SA17	0.752				
	SA18	0.736				
	SA3	0.763				
	SA7	0.747				
	SA8	0.702				
	SA9	0.771				
	SA1	0.783				
Customer Engagement	CEG1	0.739	0.947	0.949	0.953	0.593
	CEG10	0.788				
	CEG11	0.786				
	CEG17	0.787				
	CEG18	0.798				
	CEG19	0.765				
	CEG2	0.751				
	CEG20	0.771				
	CEG21	0.755				
	CEG22	0.769				
	CEG3	0.768				
	CEG4	0.755				
	CEG6	0.784				
	CEG7	0.767				
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.779	0.793	0.792	0.866	0.618
	BL2	0.811				
	BL3	0.731				
	BL4	0.819				

Discriminant validity in this study was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with a threshold of 0.90 indicating acceptable discriminant validity (Hair

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Salma Nurhaliza, Indrawati

et al., 2016). Table 2 shows that the research constructs met these criteria, thus, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was proven.

Table 2. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	Brand Loyalty	Customer Engagement	Store Attributes
Brand Loyalty			
Customer Engagement	0.688		
Store Attributes	0.639	0.621	

The square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the correlations with other variables. Based on the results shown in the table, it can be concluded that the constructs meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

Table 3. Fornell-Lacker

	Brand Loyalty	Customer Engagement	Store Attributes
Brand Loyalty	0.786		
Customer Engagement	0.603	0.77	
Store Attributes	0.553	0.591	0.747

4.1.2. Outer Models

The R-square value is used to assess how much variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables. According to Hair et al. (2016), an R-square value of 0.75 indicates a strong model, 0.50 indicates a moderate model, and 0.25 indicates a weak model.

Table 4. Coefficient Determination

|	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Loyalty	0.423	0.419
Customer Engagement	0.349	0.347

4.1.3. Hypothesis Results

According to Indrawati (2015), hypothesis testing predicts outcomes from data. A one-tailed hypothesis test was used in this study to assess relationships between variables. Path coefficients, t-values, and p-values can evaluate hypothesis testing results. The table shows the significance and direction of each hypothesis, revealing the strength and relevance of the relationships studied.

Table 5 Hypothesis Results

Hypotesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statictic	P Values	Results
H1	Store Attributes -> Customer Engagement	0.586	13.926	0	Support
H2	Customer Engagement -> Brand Loyalty	0.422	5.952	0	Support
H3	Store Attributes -> Brand Loyalty	0.309	4.333	0	Support
H4	Store Attributes -> Customer Engagement -> Brand Loyalty	0.247	5.361	0	Support

As Shown in Table 5 the hypothesis results, it was determined that all the hypothesia were supported. Store attributes have a positive and significant effect to customer engagement with p-value 0,000 < 0,005, t-statistic 13,926 > 1,65. Hypotesis 2 states that customer engagement have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty

with p-value $0,000 < 0,05$, and t-statistic $5,952 > 1,65$. Hypothesis 3 states that store attributes have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty with p-value $0,000 < 0,05$ and t-statistic $4,333 > 1,65$. The last hypothesis is states the indirect effect of store attribute on brand loyalty mediated by customer engagement have a positive and significant effect with p value $0,000 < 0,05$ and t-statistic $5,361 > 1,65$.
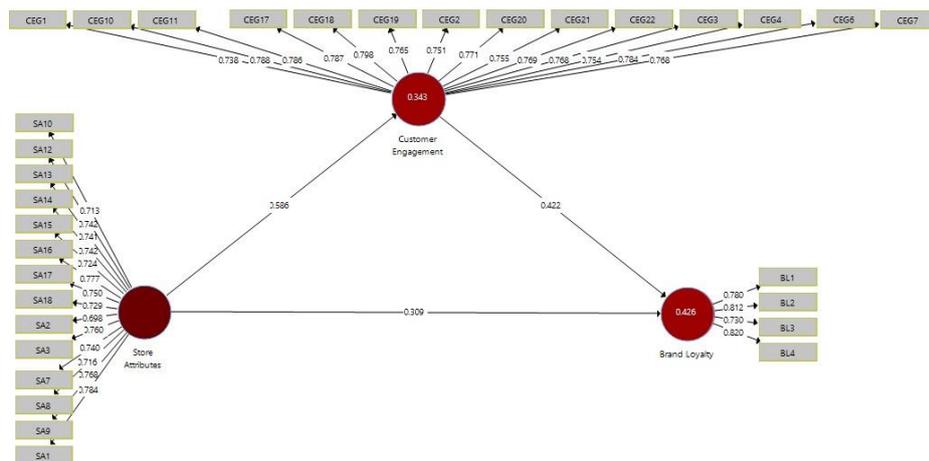
Figure 1. Research Framework
Source: processed data (2024)

4.2. Discussion

This research examined the impact of store attributes on brand loyalty. Statistical tests showed a direct positive and significant impact of merchandise on customer experience. Store attributes allow consumers to form perceptions of a store's image. Research by Anggara et al. (2023) explains that all dimensions of store attributes, including merchandise, staff communication, store atmosphere, and transaction convenience, positively and significantly affect customer experience. This means that higher levels of store attributes lead to higher levels of customer experience. Similarly, Verhoef et al. (2009) found that positive store attributes result in positive customer experiences.

Customer engagement, which involves consumers directly or indirectly in a retailer's marketing activities, also influences customer experiences (McLean & Wilson, 2019). These findings support previous studies that highlight the importance of interactive customer experiences in determining customer engagement (Bennett, 2013; Hayes & MacLeod, 2007; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). Creating strong customer engagement over the long term will lead customers to continue using the services offered by the company (Islam et al., 2020). Customer engagement is understood as a psychological process that involves behavioral manifestations and motivational psychological states. According to research by So et al. (2016b), customer engagement outside the purchasing process significantly influences brand loyalty in the airline and hotel industries. Additionally, customer engagement significantly impacts service brand evaluation and brand trust, ultimately leading to brand loyalty.

This study primarily focuses on specific store attributes, such as merchandise, staff communication, store atmosphere, and transaction convenience, limiting the generalizability of the findings across different retail contexts. Additionally, the study relies on cross-sectional data, which may not capture the dynamic nature of customer engagement over time. Future researchers could explore other variabels such as customer satisfaction and purchase intention or expand the scope to different retail sectors. Longitudinal studies are recommended to better understand the evolving relationship between customer experience, engagement, and brand loyalty. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into customer perceptions and experiences.

5. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that store attributes, particularly merchandise, significantly impact customer experience and brand loyalty in retail settings. Customer engagement, influenced by these attributes, plays a crucial role in shaping customer experiences and fostering long-term brand loyalty. The study's findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of positive store attributes and interactive customer experiences in driving engagement and loyalty. However, limitations in scope and methodology suggest opportunities for future research, including exploring additional variables, expanding to different retail sectors, conducting longitudinal studies, and incorporating qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into customer perceptions and experiences.

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