

## Why Customers are Loyal to Fast-food Restaurants: Mediation of Brand Equity

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### ABSTRACT

*Development of businesses in the continuous food and drink industry is also visible from an increasing number of restaurants. For that, research was conducted to examine the effect of promotion and quality service on customers with brand equities as intervening variables in fast-food restaurants. Population in study: A fast-food restaurant. The technique used to take a sample in the study. This applies purposive sampling with a sample total of 220 respondents. Research data collection: This uses a questionnaire. Data analysis in study using SEM AMOS 24. Research results show that promotion and quality service are positively and significantly influential on brand equities and customer loyalty. and also, an brand equity influential, positive, and significant to loyalty customer equity; brand capable of mediating between variables, promotion and quality service to loyalty customer.*

**Keywords:** *fast food, promotion, service quality, brand equity, customer loyalty.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the business world development, this is what it means to be competitive: companies must behave and act fast if they want their company to survive. In competitive market conditions, a loyal consumer is key to success. Having customer loyalty is a valuable asset to a company because customers are the element that selects a product or service to consume. For that, customers need to be cared for and served so that they feel satisfied with a product or service. The company must give what the desired consumer wants in the product or service, accompanied by the service. All the power and efforts the company needs to deploy to achieve maximum satisfaction, which leads to consumer loyalty.

The need for food is a daily necessity for every human. In general, people need to eat at home, but in a changing society, people become more consumerist and tend to fulfill their food needs by purchasing food from restaurants, depots, and others. The food industry is the most profitable sector, which is why the distribution of fast-food restaurants is among the fastest growing sectors. It is one of the growing restaurant chains that is rapidly expanding in almost every city (Sarboini et al., 2022).

As the population grows, human needs for basic necessities like food and Drink become more in demand. As the situation stands, it is clear that food and drink have a promising business. The development of the business in the continuous food and drink industry is

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also visible from the increasing number of restaurant / house eaters. However, there is one fast-food restaurant that sells fried chicken, which came in the Top Brand Award. The Top Brands Award (2022) shows fluctuations in interest in buying customer products from fast-food restaurants during the period 2020 to 2024. In 2020, interest buy recorded by 33%. However, in 2021, there was a decline by 4.50% to 28.50%. Furthermore, in 2022, interest buy return experience improved by 2% to 30.50%; however, it then decreased again in 2023 by 3% to 27.50%. In 2024, interest buy experience relative increase small, namely by 0.6%, to 28.10%. In total, over the past five years, the interest in buying from fast-food restaurants declined by 4.9%. If the condition is not met through the right marketing strategy, then consumer interest will decline and continue to decline in the years to come.

To describe the factors that influence customer loyalty at a fast-food restaurant, researchers conducted a pre-survey of 25 customers. Pre-survey: This covers four variables, namely promotion, services quality, brand equity, and loyalty of customers. The results show that, for the variable promotion, only 8 respondents (32%) agreed that the promotion of fast-food restaurants was interesting, while 17 respondents (68%) did not agree. Regarding variable-quality services, 9 respondents (36%) stated that the service was already good, while 16 respondents (64%) thought the opposite. For the variable brand equity, 10 respondents (40%) agreed that the KFC brand influences the decision to visit, while 15 respondents (60%) did not agree. Meanwhile, customer loyalty is still low, with only 9 respondents (36%) stating they would return, and 16 respondents (64%) stating they would not. Findings: This shows the need for repair in promotion, service quality, and strengthening the brand equity to improve customer loyalty at the fast-food restaurant.

Pre-survey results show a number of problems can be formulated that need to be addressed and further investigated. First, why are promotions by fast-food restaurants not yet capable of attracting many customers? Second, how quality services are provided by fast-food restaurants, and which factors need improvement to increase customer satisfaction. Third, how customers perceive brand equity of a fast-food restaurant and efforts that can be made to strengthen brand equity. Fourth, what are the affecting factors for low customer loyalty at fast-food restaurants, and what kind of strategies that can increase customer loyalty optimally?

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Research on customer loyalty is an interesting field. However, due to the large number of studies on the influence of loyalty, especially those influenced by promotions, these studies have different results. Some studies show that promotions influence loyalty (Khoirulloh et al., 2018; Farisi & Siregar, 2020; Widnyani et al., 2020; Basuki & Tami, 2022; Yanto et al., 2020), while others state that promotions do not affect loyalty (Rosyidi et al., 2023; Anggraini & Budiarti, 2020; Budiarti, 2021; Taris & Purwanto, 2022; Arianto, 2019). Therefore, research on the promotions effect on loyalty is necessary. To complement other factors that influence loyalty, this study also includes service quality as well as brand equity.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Promotion Effect on Brand Equity**

Umer (2019) stated that promotions significantly affect brand equity. Promotion is essential in building brand equity because it can increase consumer awareness and positive perceptions of the brand. With the right promotional strategy, consumers will become more familiar with and trust the brand, which can enhance the brand's equity value in the market. Research conducted by Ruliana (2017), Promotional Strategies that affect Brand Equity. Effective promotions can enhance brand equity by increasing customer awareness and brand positive perceptions. When companies offer discounts, giveaways, or other promotions, this not only attracts attention but also strengthens the brand's image in the customers' eyes, making them more loyal and familiar with the brand. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: Promotion Effect on Brand Equity

### **Service Quality Effect on Brand Equity**

Research by Wulandari & Rastini (2022) indicates that service quality affects positively and significantly on brand equity. Service quality relates to products or services that are expected to meet consumer expectations. Brand equity includes assets and liabilities associated with a name and symbol that add or subtract from the value of product and service for companies or customer. Hence, high brand equity can encourage customers to be more loyal and provide a better assessment of the service quality received, creating a mutually reinforcing reciprocal relationship. Research conducted by Hanaysha

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& Hilman (2015) found that service quality is brand equity significant driver.

Superior service quality can strengthen brand equity by creating a positive, memorable experience for customers. When customers are satisfied with the service, they tend to recommend the brand and enhance its positive public image, thereby strengthening the brand's value. Therefore, this study proposes:

H<sub>2</sub>: Service Quality Effect on Brand Equity

### **Promotion Influence on Customer Loyalty**

Sugiharto and Sugiono (2020) indicated that service quality influences customer loyalty. Therefore, the higher the quality provided, the more customers's loyalty. Good service quality creates customer satisfaction, which ultimately encourages repeat purchases, positive recommendations, and emotional attachment to the brand, leading to increased loyalty. The results can prove that higher or better service quality will increase customer loyalty. Nurofik & Wiana (2022) obtained that service quality affects positively but insignificantly on customer loyalty.

Good service quality creates good relationships between companies and customers, ultimately increasing loyalty. When customers feel well-treated, served promptly, and have a positive experience, they tend to return and choose the same brand in the future. Hence, this study proposes:

H<sub>3</sub>: Promotion Influence on Customer Loyalty

### **Service Quality Influence on Customer Loyalty**

Research by Sugiharto and Sugiono (2020) indicates that service quality influences customer loyalty. Hence, the higher the quality, the more customers loyalty. Good service quality creates customer satisfaction, which ultimately encourages repeat purchases, positive recommendations, and emotional attachment to the brand, leading to increased loyalty. The results can prove that higher or better service quality will increase customer loyalty. Nurofik & Wiana (2022) obtained that service quality affects positively but insignificantly on customer loyalty.

Good service quality creates good relationships between companies and customers, ultimately increasing loyalty. When customers feel well-treated, served promptly, and have a positive experience, they tend to return and choose the same brand in the future. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: Service Influence Quality on Customer Loyalty

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### **Brand Equity Influence on Customer Loyalty**

Muhtarom et al (2021) stated that brand equity will partially affect customer loyalty. High brand equity enhances customer loyalty, as customers will trust and feel emotionally connected to brands with good reputations more. Conversely, strong customer loyalty can strengthen brand equity, as loyal customers will repurchase more often and recommend the brand to others. Permatasari et al (2022) found that brand equity affects positively and significantly customer loyalty.

Strong brand equity makes customers more confident and comfortable with a product or service. When a brand has a good reputation, a positive image, and is widely recognized, customers tend to be more loyal because they feel confident in the quality and consistency of its offerings. As a result, customers prefer to stick with that brand even when there are many other options on the market. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H<sub>5</sub>: Brand Equity Influence on Customer Loyalty

### **Promotion Influence on Customer Loyalty through Brand Equity**

Promotion is essential in building brand equity, where effective promotion can increase awareness, positive associations, and perceived brand value in the customers' minds. Strong brand equity ultimately contributes to creating customer loyalty. In addition to its direct influence, promotion also indirectly influences customer loyalty through brand equity as a mediating variable. This is appropriate to Sayuti (2017), which stated that brand equity can significantly mediate the promotion effect on customer loyalty.

H<sub>6</sub>: Brand Equity Mediates Promotion on Customer Loyalty

### **Service Quality Influence on Customer Loyalty through Brand Equity**

Service quality is essential factor in enhancing brand equity. Good service makes a positive brand perception in the customers' minds. Strong brand equity, in turn, builds customer loyalty. Furthermore, service quality also affects indirectly on customer loyalty through brand equity as a mediating variable. This finding aligns with research findings (Suyadi, 2021).

H<sub>7</sub>: Brand equity mediates service quality on customer loyalty

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The review of the penetration theory and the problem found, as a basis for formulating a hypothesis, the following depicts the framework of the influence between variables. Research This will look for influence between variables exogenous (Promotion, Service Quality), endogenous (Loyalty Customers), and intervening (Brand Equity) as follows:

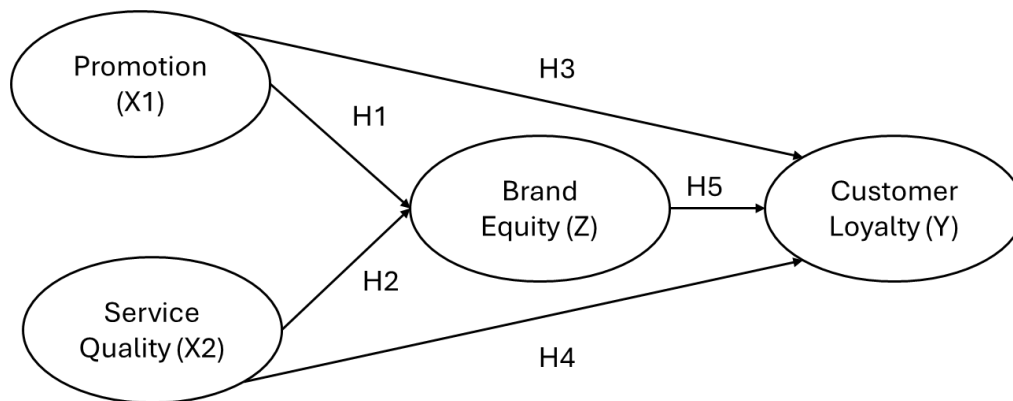


Figure 1: Analysis Model

## METHOD, DATA AND ANALYSIS

This analysis used a deductive approach, starting with formulating a hypothesis and then testing model suitability and validity through data collection and analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2017). Purposive sampling was used as the sampling technique because it was deemed most appropriate for the research characteristics.

The research variables consist of exogenous, endogenous, and intervening variables. Exogenous are variables that influence other variables, namely promotion (X1) and service quality (X2). Endogenous are variables that are affected by other variables, namely, customer loyalty (Y). Meanwhile, intervening variables act as an indirect link between exogenous and endogenous variables, namely brand equity (Z).

This analysis applies primary data which is directly from respondents through questionnaires related to promotions, service quality, customer loyalty, and brand equity, while secondary data is from books, theses, journals, and relevant internet sources. The study population is all consumers who have purchased from and are aware of fast-food restaurants. The sample is 220 respondents, with a non-probability sampling method through purposive sampling. The sample criteria include having purchased fast food

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restaurant products at least three times in the last 12 months, and being aged 18–45 years. Data collection was carried out through a survey applying Google Forms, with an interval scale of 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

This research applies data analysis with the SEM method through the AMOS 24 program to find causal correlation between variables and test hypotheses (Ferdinand, 2014; Ghozali, 2008, in Haryono, 2016). SEM was chosen because it is able to identify construct dimensions while measuring the influence between variables. The initial stage includes the development of a theoretical model and flowchart that distinguishes exogenous (promotion and service quality) and endogenous (customer loyalty) constructs as well as intervening variables (brand equity), then converted into a structural equation and measurement model (Haryono, 2016). The analysis uses a covariance matrix with Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) estimation and a minimum of 100 respondents. Model identification is carried out by observing residuals and modifications based on the modification index (MI) to improve the chi-square. Before evaluation, the data is tested for multivariate normality, linearity, and outliers. The assessment of model suitability is carried out by paying attention to the goodness-of-fit and cut-off values of various indices so that the estimated model is valid and can be interpreted theoretically.

## RESULTS

Data obtained, then performed descriptive analysis of the type, gender, age and number of purchases. Respondents in the study: this includes various sex types, totaling 116 respondents, with 53% compared to female respondents, totaling 104 respondents, with 47%. Based on classification age, total respondents aged 18-22 years is 128, with a percentage 58%, total respondents aged 23-27 years is 83, with a percentage 38%, total respondents aged 28-31 is 8, with a percentage 3%, and total respondents aged 32-45 is 1, with a percentage 1%. For the classification of purchase amount, the respondents are dominated by those who do 172 respondents purchased 3-7 times, with a percentage 78%, representing 78%. The following are respondents who purchased more than 8 times, with 48 respondents, with presentation by 22%.

The convergent validity test shows the factor loading value has exceeded the cut-off value, which is more than 0.5. Therefore, all statements in the test that were asked are

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proven valid, so that they can be carried out to the next research stage. The AVE test results indicate each variable meets the requirement of being greater than 0.5, so it is declared valid. Based on the results of the construct reliability test, all variables meet the requirement of exceeding 0.7, indicating they are reliable. In detail, the validity and reliability tests are presented in Table 1.

*Table: 1 Measurement of variables, indicators, validity, and reliability*

<b>Variables and Indicator Scale Items</b>		<b>Std. Loading</b>	<b>Critical ratio <math>\geq</math> 1.96</b>
<b>Promotion (X1) (AVE= 0.576 ; CR= 0.840 )</b>			
X1.1	The promotional message made me more confident in the product being offered.	0.720	11,011
X1.2	Promotion through social media makes it easier for me to get product information.	0.791	11,011
X1.3	I often see promotions for this product at times that suit my habits.	0.715	9,813
X1.4	Frequent promotions make me more familiar with the products offered.	0.777	10,527
<b>Service Quality (X2) (AVE= 0.548); CR= 0.858)</b>			
X2.1	I feel that the cleanliness and orderliness of fast food restaurant facilities demonstrates a serious concern for service quality.	0.778	11,390
X2.2	The service I received was as promised by the restaurant	0.744	11,390
X2.3	The fast food restaurant waiter responded to my request quickly.	0.808	12,176
X2.4	Fast food restaurant waiters demonstrate a high level of professionalism in serving customers.	0.773	11,606
<b>Brand Equity (Z ) (AVE= 0.563; CR= 0.847 )</b>			
Z1.1	I can recognize Brand X among other similar brands.	0.720	10,470
Z1.2	Products from Brand X have better quality than other brands in the same category.	0.738	10,470
Z1.3	Brand X is one of the brands that immediately comes to mind for me in a particular product category.	0.732	10,267
Z1.4	I prefer brand X over other brands in the same category.	0.764	10,741
<b>Customer Loyalty (Y ) (AVE= 0.574; CR= 0.871)</b>			

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Y1.1	I always buy fast food restaurant brand X products over other products in the same category.	0.689	10,714
Y1.2	I am not tempted to switch to Brand X's competitors even though they offer similar products.	0.770	10,714
Y1.3	I would recommend Brand X products to my friends or family.	0.809	11,108
Y1.4	I am interested in trying other products offered by Brand X.	0.778	10,749
Y1.5	I am not tempted to switch to Brand X's competitors even if they offer lower prices.	0.764	10,589

Source: Results from the estimation, 2025

Furthermore, the regression weight test can be obtained with a 5.084 CR value and a 0.001 significance value (P). Because the P value <0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. The value indicates the results meet the test requirements, namely less than 0.05 for the P value and the CR value is more than 1.645. The promotion affects positively and significantly on brand equity, so H1 is accepted. The regression weight test can be obtained with a 5.860 CR value and a 0.001significance value (P). Because the P value <0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. This value indicates the results meet the test requirements, namely less than 0.05 for the P value and the CR value is more than 1.645. This means service quality affects positively and significantly on brand equity, so H2 is accepted. The regression weight test shows a 4.720 CR value and a 0.001 significance value (P). Because the P value <0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. The value indicates that the results meet the test requirements, namely less than 0.05 for the P value and the CR value is more than 1.645. Therefore, brand equity affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty, so H5 is accepted. The regression weight test indicates that the CR value is 3.206 and the significance value (P) is 0.001. Because the P value <0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. The value indicates that the results meet the test requirements, namely less than 0.05 for the P value and the CR value is more than 1.645. The promotion affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty, so H3 is accepted. The regression weight test indicates the CR value is 2.334 and the significance value (P) is 0.020. Although the P value is still below 0.05, in some research standards this value can be considered close to significant but not as strong as other variables, therefore this hypothesis is declared accepted with the note that the effect is positive and significant. This value indicates that

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the test results meet the requirements, namely less than 0.05 for the P value and a CR value of more than 1.645. Therefore, service quality affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty, thus H4 is accepted. Table 2 presents the hypothesis test.

*Table 2: Hypothesis Test Results*

Relationship between variables			CR	P	Information	
Promotion	→	Brand equity	5.084	0.001	Positive and significant	Accepted
Service Quality	→	Brand equity	5.860	0.001	Positive and significant	Accepted
Promotion	→	Customer loyalty	3.206	0.001	Positive and significant	Accepted
Service Quality	→	Customer loyalty	2.334	0.020	Positive and significant	Accepted
Brand equity	→	Customer loyalty	4.720	0.001	Positive and significant	Accepted

Source: Results from the estimation, 2025

The mediation (intervening) effect test conducted obtains results:

The Promotion (X1) effect on Customer Loyalty (Y) through Brand Equity (Z) shows that the direct effect value is 0.210, the indirect effect value is 0.220, and the total effect is 0.429. Based on these results, the Brand Equity (Z) variable can mediate the Promotion (X1) effect on Customer Loyalty (Y).

The Service Quality (X2) effect on Customer Loyalty (Y) through Brand Equity (Z) shows that the direct effect value is 0.160, the indirect effect value is 0.252, and the total effect is 0.411. Thus, the Brand Equity variable (Z) is also can mediate the Service Quality (X2) effect on Customer Loyalty (Y). Overall, the results of the intervening test show that Brand Equity acts as a mediating variable that can strengthen both Promotion and Service Quality effect on Customer Loyalty.

## DISCUSSION

The H1 test shows that promotions affects positively and significantly on brand equity at fast-food restaurant. This means that effective promotions can increase brand equity by increasing customer awareness and positive perceptions of the brand. When companies offer discounts, gifts, or other promotions, this not only attracts attention but also strengthens the brand image in the customers' eyes, making them more loyal and familiar

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with the brand. The more intensive and effective the promotion is, the more brand equity will increase. This finding is appropriate to marketing theory which states that promotions can build positive consumer perceptions of the brand offered. These results support Umer (2019) which analysed that promotions affects significantly on brand equity.

The H2 test proved that service quality affects positively and significantly on brand equity at fast-food restaurant. This means that the better the service quality provided, the higher the brand equity value in the consumers' eyes. This finding supports the previous research which stated that quality service can strengthen the brand's image and position in the customers' minds. Superior service quality can strengthen brand equity by creating a positive and memorable experience for customers. When customers are satisfied, they tend to recommend the brand and improve the brand's positive image in the public eye, which in turn strengthens the brand's value. This analysis supports Wulandari & Rastini's research (2022), which stated that service quality affects positively and significantly on brand equity.

The H3 test showed that brand equity affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty at restaurants in Kudus. Thus, strong brand equity will encourage customers loyalty. This aligns with the concept that brands with high equity are able to create stronger emotional bonds with customers. Strong brand equity makes customers more trusting and comfortable with a product or service. When a brand has a good reputation, a positive image, and is widely known, customers tend to be more loyal because they feel confident in the quality and consistency offered. As a result, customers prefer to continue using that brand even though there are many choices in the market. This analysis supports Permatasari *et al.*, (2022) who found that brand equity affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty.

The H4 test indicates that promotions affect positively and significantly on customer loyalty at fast-food restaurant. This means that targeted and attractive promotions can encourage customers to use products or services. This result appropriates to marketing theory, which states that promotions is crucial role in creating customer loyalty. Appropriate promotions can increase customer loyalty by providing added value and making customers feel appreciated. When customers receive discounts, gifts, or exclusive offers, they tend to be more satisfied and more interested in returning to

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purchase in the future. This analysis supports Khoirulloh et al., (2018), who found that promotions affects positively and significantly on customer loyalty.

The H5 test shows that service quality affects positively but insignificantly on customer loyalty at fast-food restaurant. Although the direction of the effect is positive, the strength of the effect is not as strong as the other variables in this study. This indicates that other factors including brand equity and promotions are more dominant in affecting customer loyalty than service quality. Good service quality can build strong relationships between companies and customers, which ultimately increases loyalty. When customers feel well treated, served quickly, and have a positive experience, they tend to return and choose the same brand in the future. The results of this study support Nurofik & Wiana, (2022) who obtained that service quality affects positively but insignificantly on customer loyalty.

The H6 test shows that promotions can influence customer loyalty through brand equity at fast-food restaurant. This means that promotions function as a marketing communication tool aimed at attracting consumer attention and interest in a product or brand. Effective promotions can increase awareness, positive associations, and brand value perceptions in the customers' minds. Strong brand equity ultimately contributes to creating customer loyalty. This analysis support Sayuti (2017), who stated that brand equity can significantly mediate the promotions influence on customer loyalty.

The H7 test shows that service quality can affect customer loyalty through brand equity at fast-food restaurant. This means that service quality is a essential factor in enhancing brand equity, as good service makes a positive brand perception in the customers' minds. Strong brand equity can further build customer loyalty, and as a result, customers tend to become loyal. This analysis support Suyadi (2021), who found that brand equity significantly mediates the service quality effect on customer loyalty.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the era of competition growing business strict, loyalty customers become factor key success companies, including in the sector fast serving food like fast-food restaurant. Although fast-food restaurant This own superiority in popular services and products, Top Brand Award data shows existence decline interest buy customer by 4.9% in five years last (2020–2024). This show challenges faced fast-food restaurants to maintain loyalty

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consumers. The results of a pre-survey of 25 customers also revealed lack of response positive to promotion (68%), quality services (64%), brand equity (60%), and loyalty customers (64%), indicating the need improvement of marketing and service strategies.

Based on results of research, promotion has proven influential, positive and significant to brand equity. This shows that effective activity promotion can increase values and perceptions brand in mind consumers. In addition, the quality the service also has influence positive and significant to brand equity, so that good service capable strengthen image and trust consumer to brand.

Brand equity Alone affects positively and significantly loyalty customers, showing that the stronger brand equity, increasingly tall level faithfulness customer to brand In addition, promotions also provide influence positive and significant in a way direct to loyalty customers, which means promotion Not only strengthen brand, but also encourage customer for still loyal.

Quality service also has an impact positive to loyalty customers, even though level its significance lower compared to variables others, however, still can accept in a way. With Thus, promotion and quality service play an important role in build brand equities, which in turn contributes to increase loyalty to customers. Both variables This own influence double, good in a way direct and no direct through brand equity, against loyalty customer.

The results and conclusions show several suggestions that can be given for fast-food restaurant. The company should Keep going improve promotional strategies with creative, informative and relevant approach with target market needs, in order to strengthen image brand at a time push loyalty customers. Improvement quality service also remains become priority, especially in matter speed service, friendliness employees and comfort facilities, because matter This in a way No direct participate strengthens loyalty through improvement brand equity. In addition, strengthening brand equities must become focus long term with notice dimensions like awareness brand, perception quality, association brand and loyalty brand, remember variables This proven become important in create loyalty customer. Business Manager recommended doing routine evaluation of effectiveness promotion and quality services, as well as notice perception consumer brands, so that the strategy implemented is truly capable of giving mark plus for

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customers. Further, based on multiple correlation results, it is recommended for enter variables addition like satisfaction customer or trust consumers (Andriana, 2025) so that research furthermore can give a clearer picture comprehensive about factors that influence customer loyalty.

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