

Analysis of Differentiation Strategies in Maintaining Customer Loyalty in Food MSMEs in Jember (Case study of Gado-gado barokah cak Kirun)

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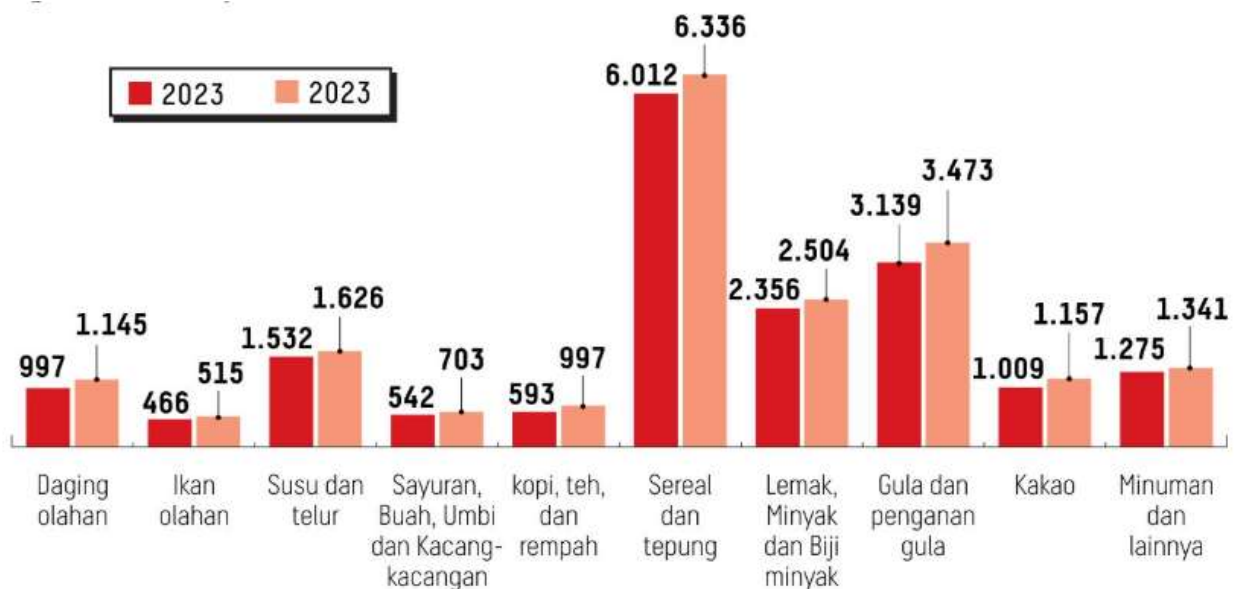
ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to find out the strategy of maintaining customer loyalty in culinary businesses. One of the businesses that supports the national economy that cannot be underestimated is Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), namely Gado-Gado Cak Kirun. **Method:** This research uses descriptive qualitative methods through the collection of survey data and observation. **Results:** The research findings indicate that Gado-Gado Cak Kirun has a distinctive aroma of peanut sauce that is savory, sweet, and spicy, with a fresh texture similar to a salad with peanut sauce, full of a variety of vegetables and combined with quality protein sources, carbohydrate sources, and sources of fat from peanuts, making one serving nutritionally complete. Marketing is conducted using social media accounts, and the key attitudes applied in serving consumers include manners, friendliness, and patience. **Novelty:** This study highlights the combination of product uniqueness, digital marketing strategies, and customer service approaches in maintaining customer loyalty in the culinary business, specifically within MSMEs.

INTRODUCTION

One of the business industries that is experiencing rapid development and changes in the Indonesian economy is business actors in the culinary sector. Data has shown that the food and beverage industry business is still estimated to grow 5% in 2024, this data was conveyed by the Chairman of Gapmmi Adhi S Lukman that the Indonesian Food and Beverage Producers Association projects that its industry performance can still grow 5% this year. This figure is greater than the national economic growth in the third quarter of 2024 of 4.95% on an annual basis compared to the previous year which only reached 4.47% [1]. Meanwhile, according to Trade Minister Budi Santoso quoted in the news on November katadata.co.id, 2024, he said that the average growth of food and beverage exports reached 6.8% in 2019-2023. Then, in January-August 2024, the figure increased by 6.4% on an annual basis [2].

This proves that the demand for food and beverages in the global market has increased, so the minister of trade said that the national food and beverage industry has the opportunity to meet the demand of the export market. The following is market size data from imported processed foods in 2023-2024:



Source: Central Statistics Agency, processed by Swiss Global Enterprise

Figure 1. Food industry growth data in 2023.

On a large, medium or small scale, a business process will definitely undergo changes due to the development of its resources, products produced, an increasingly extensive marketing system or increasingly large capital. In this case, the business process will play a role in planning until the business process runs. Currently, business processes are not only designed by large organizations but small and medium businesses are also starting to apply business process analysis to their businesses [3].

In accordance with the research conducted by [4] with the research title The Influence of Differentiation Strategy on Customer Loyalty (Case Study of Zanafa Bookstore) Metropolitan City Pekanbaru states that the Differentiation Strategy has a significant effect on customer loyalty at the Zanafa Bookstore Metropolitan City Pekanbaru, this can be seen in the results of the research. The results of the Descriptive Analysis show that the Differentiation Strategy carried out by the Zanafa Metropolitan City Bookstore Pekanbaru is generally quite good, This can be shown from customers who repurchase products.

[5] in his study concluded that based on the results of field research on respondents' responses to the differentiation strategy, most of them showed a high level of approval (within the range of questionnaire research criteria (85%-100%). This shows that respondents recognize that differentiation strategies, both through products and services, have the potential to increase their interest in making purchases.

From the results of this study, referring to the theory [6] Differentiation strategy is the act of establishing a set of meaningful differences to differentiate a company's offerings from its competitors, this strategy is usually suitable for use in markets that are not price sensitive and require something special to meet the needs of their consumers and create customer loyalty.

So entering this millennial era, the future marketing direction has shifted from the conventional approach to the modern approach, where the conventional approach emphasizes customer satisfaction, cost reduction, market share, and market research while the modern approach focuses on customer loyalty, customer retention, no defection and lifetime customers [7].

The increasing development of food and beverages is what gives rise to innovations, especially for food products where the types of food culinary in the Jember area are very diverse, of course this makes each food culinary have a different taste and peculiarity so that food culinary connoisseurs will feel inclined to what they feel and their respective food tastes.

Their inclination as culinary connoisseurs will be contained in terms of good taste, affordable prices, products and place conditions so that business actors are able to think about product differentiation where product differentiation is an effort made by business actors to create a differentiator between their products and other people's products, so that the product has its own characteristics that are expected to be able to attract consumer interest in a product [8].

The number of culinary tourism in the Jember area makes business actors challenge to convince consumers about the products they offer, so the marketing challenge that is currently being faced is to increase customer retention to maintain sales stability. Marketing itself must be broad and not just waiting for the ball but UMKM must pick up the ball to get more consumers. The marketing strategy applied by business actors is very varied in accordance with the advantages of the products marketed and consumer tastes in a region.

Product differentiation and service quality both have an important role in retaining customers so that they do not switch to competitors who have similar products. One of them is that UMKM in the food sector can also take advantage of differentiation strategies to be able to increase the company's sales, namely "UMKM Gado-gado Pak Kirun Jember". "UMKM Gado-gado Pak Kirun Jember" is a business in the food sector that was established in 2014 until now 2024. This MSME has 3 employees in its operational activities. The first beginning (in 1997) of Pak Kirun's gado-gado was a joint venture between Mr. Kasirun and his brother and sold in the Jember KAI Station area, then in 2010 to 2014 Pak Kasirun started a Gado-gado business with his own brand, namely Gado-gado Kirun and sold around Gajah Mada Kaliwates street. In 2014 until now, he sells on Jalan PB Sudirman in front of the Prosperous Cooperative Shop with hospital Tk. III Baladhika Husada Jember. At the beginning of selling with the Gado-gado brand, Kirun could only sell 20 portions every day, but because of the seriousness and perseverance of the owner, finally Gado-gado Pak Kirun sold 25 to 40 portions per day.

Pak Kirun's gado-gado is located on Jalan PB Sudirman, by renting land in front of the Rumkit TK Cooperative. III Baladhika Husada Jember and its strategic location because it is on the side of the highway. Then in terms of the marketing strategy used by Gado-gado, Pak Kirun utilizes Digital Platforms such as Grab Food, Go Food, Shopie

Food, and Maxim Food. Data on sales results from "UMKM Gado-gado Pak Kirun Jember" for the 2023 period, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Gado-Gado Sales Results 2023-2024.

No	Bulan	Tahun	Total Penjualan
1.	Januari	2023	Rp 4.800.000
2.	Februari	2023	Rp 6.600.000
3.	Maret	2023	Rp 6.900.000
4.	April	2023	Rp 5.400.000
5.	Mei	2023	Rp 5.700.000
6.	Juni	2023	Rp 5.600.000
7.	Juli	2023	Rp 7.200.000
8.	Agustus	2023	Rp 6.000.000
9.	September	2023	Rp 7.800.000
10.	Oktober	2023	Rp 7.560.000
11.	Nopember	2023	Rp 7.040.000
12.	Desember	2023	Rp 6.600.000
13.	Januari	2024	Rp 7.600.000

Source : Gado-gado Pak kirun Jember

Based on the data in Table 1., it shows that in Pak Kirun's Gado-gado UMKM experience ups and downs due to competition, namely there are several gado-gado sellers around the area and consumers have become more sensitive, where many new snacks such as meatballs, chicken noodles, geprek chicken, tofu kecek, etc. have been opened, resulting in a decrease in interest for Pak Kirun's Gado-gado. So MSMEs in the culinary sector continue to strive to be attractive, maintain distinctiveness compared to hodgepodge in general and maintain customer loyalty with various strategies. Not only focusing on customer satisfaction, MSMEs also need to formulate new strategies to increase sales and expand market share. This effort is important to ensure business continuity and strengthen the position of MSMEs in the culinary industry. Based on this background description, the researcher is interested in conducting a research entitled "Analysis Of Differentiation Strategies In Maintaining Customer Loyalty In Food Umkm In Jember (Case Study Of Gado-Gado Barokah Cak Kirun).

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive. This method is carried out by analyzing and describing how Pak Kirun Jember's Gado-gado UMKM in a differentiation strategy in order to compete with similar business people. Data sources were obtained from interviews and observations to owners to find out the information needed in this study. The respondent is the owner of the Gado-gado UMKM, Mr. Kirun Jember.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Product Differentiation

Gado-gado Pak Kirun is one of the UMKM in the culinary field in Jember Regency, which was officially established in 2010, where previously as the owner of Gado-Gado Pak Kirun, Mr. Kasirun in 1997 had sold gado-gado with his older brother with the brand name Gado-gado Barokah which at that time was sold on Jalan Wijayakusuma in front of the PJKA Jember office. Then in 2010 he sold gado-gado independently without his brother on Jalan Gajah Mada Kaliwates Jember, then in 2014 until now he moved again to Jalan PB Sudirman (in front of Koperasi Sejahtera with RS Baladhika Husada Jember). For the gado-gado recipe, it is the result of Mr. Kasirun's recipe when he was still selling gado-gado with his brother, but over time Mr. Kasirun tried it (3 times). During the third experiment, the taste of the gado-gado was delicious and just right, then he decided to start an independent business. To achieve its goals in carrying out an UMKM business, it must have a mission, where the mission plays a role in differentiating UMKM in the midst of a sea of businesses. In the midst of many UMKM offering similar products, a unique and strong mission will help UMKM stand out and attract the attention of consumers. A clear mission will provide an identity and characteristics that distinguish UMKM from their competitors. For example, Mr. Kirun's Gado-gado Mission "To become a pioneer in famous gado-gado cuisine with a distinctive Nusantara taste that is world-famous, and is loved by all groups". This mission is not only about making delicious gado-gado, but also about creating a pleasant culinary experience for many people. This mission differentiates Mr. Kirun's gado-gado from other culinary delights, and makes it a special food that is loved by many people. The aim of Pak Kirun's Gado-gado is to increase sales, become a well-known brand, and be beneficial to everyone.

Culinary entrepreneur Gado-Gado promotes his products through social media, especially the most frequently used social media account is WhatsApp.

"I think this Gado-Gado culinary marketing method is very good judging from the visits of buyers who are never empty every day so that it can make me interested in buying it." (NIA, 13 Jan 2024).

"The marketing strategy is quite good because it is done online so that more people know about it, without the need to sell around." (MH 13 Jan 2024).

2. Differentiation of Flavors

Gado-gado is not only a delicious and nutritious dish, but it is also a symbol of Indonesia's culinary richness. The combination of various ingredients and flavors in gado-gado reflects the diversity of Indonesian culture and traditions. In terms of the quality of Gado-gado Pak Kirun in maintaining and maintaining its quality, it is very visible in the appearance of its presentation, which looks beautiful with a combination of green from fresh vegetables, yellow from boiled eggs, white from rice cakes, and chocolate from peanut sauce which is savory and slightly spicy or spicy according to taste and temptation. The fragrant aroma of fried peanuts is so tempting, mixed with the aroma of garlic, chili, and fresh vegetables. The complete composition of food ingredients

makes a delicious and nutritious hodgepodge. Vegetables that are rich in vitamins and minerals, rice cakes and potatoes that are a source of carbohydrates, eggs and tofu that are rich in protein, and beans that are rich in healthy fats make gado-gado the right choice for lunch or afternoon meals for everyone from children to the elderly [10].

Pak Kirun's delicious gado-gado very well maintains the quality of its hodgepodge ingredients to produce a special and unforgettable taste, namely choosing fresh vegetables that are freshly harvested and free from pesticides, using lettuce, cabbage, sprouts, cucumbers, potatoes to add diversity of flavors and textures and vegetables are washed with running water and cleaned thoroughly before processing. Then the Lontong used is made of fluffy rice and cooked perfectly, has a soft and not hard texture and is wrapped in banana leaves to maintain its freshness. For Boiled Eggs, the eggs used are eggs with a level of maturity that suits their taste and has a bright yellow and not greenish yolk and at the time of peeling the eggs carefully so that they do not crumble. Then for tofu is chosen tofu made from high-quality soybeans, has a dense texture and is not easily crushed and fried until golden yellow and crispy.

Furthermore, for Peanut Seasoning, use quality and fragrant fried peanuts, in the next blender, fine peanuts are mixed with various spices such as chili, onion, garlic, brown sugar, tamarind water, and salt to taste and make sure that this seasoning has a balanced savory, spicy, sweet, and sour taste. To complement it, add crackers, chips, and fried onions and boiled potatoes that are sliced. By using quality ingredients and processed in the right way, Pak Kirun's gado-gado will produce a special and unforgettable taste. The combination of savory, spicy, sweet, and sour flavors from peanut sauce combined with the fresh taste of vegetables and diverse textures will pamper the taste buds of customers and buyers [11].

This is stated in an interview excerpt regarding the differentiation of Cak Kirun's Gado-Gado products according to customers from all sources:

"I think the quality of Cak Kirun's Gado-Gado culinary products is very good, in each bite it feels like not only one filling, it can be rated 85% for packaging and 85% also for taste." (MSI, Jan 12, 2024)

"Savory peanuts make the product a culinary product that is worthy of marketing." (SJ, 12 Jan 2024)

"I think it's good, if you judge it from 1-10, the value is 8.5. I happen to be a fan of culinary snacks and I feel that Gado-Gado culinary products have a taste that suits my tongue." (CS, 12 Jan 2024)

"Good protein content. The spices are delicious and just right to my taste." (KA, 19 Jan 2024)

"The appearance of the presentation is that it looks beautiful with a combination of green colors from fresh vegetables, yellow from boiled eggs, white from rice cakes, and chocolate from peanut sauce which is savory and slightly spicy or spicy according to taste and tempting." (MR, 14 Jan 2024)

From the results of the interview excerpts by several sources above regarding the differentiation of Gado-Gado Cak Kirun products, it can be concluded that consumers like Gado-Gado culinary because it presents products with good quality and helps to meet the needs and desires of consumers.

3. Differentiation of Service Quality

The service provided to consumers must be good service so that customers still feel comfortable when buying products. Good service and the sense of comfort created will make the relationship between sellers and buyers have a good relationship and trust each other.

"The quality of service is good, because when I order I come a few moments later and the delivery time can be promised in advance what time I want it." (MSI 14 Jan 2024).

"The quality of service is very good and satisfies consumers, this can be seen from the timeliness of delivery." (MR, 20 Jan 2024).

"The quality of service is friendly, besides that it is affordable and fast-moving." (V, 20 Jan 2024).

The above is the result of interviews with several speakers and it can be seen that the speakers are satisfied with the service provided by the culinary entrepreneur Gado-Gado Cak Kirun.

In communicating with consumers, either online or in person, attitude must be maintained. As a seller, it is necessary to be friendly, polite and understand what consumers want. That way, a good relationship will be established. The following are the results of interviews with resource persons regarding attitudes when serving:

"The seller is friendly, polite, patient and knows how to attract buyers." (M, 20 Jan 2024).

"A friendly attitude to consumers can make consumers interested in buying products. In addition, the pentol provides excellent service to consumers, friendly, fast, and fast response, so that consumers feel satisfied that they have ordered at the pentol" (KA, 20 Jan 2023).

"The attitude given is friendly in service, serving well and patiently." (V, 20 Jan 2024).

"The attitude in serving must be more friendly and have a good approach so that consumers are satisfied and feel comfortable when buying." (MR, June 20, 2023).

Based on the results of the interview above, consumers are satisfied with the way the seller serves. With the ability to attract buyers, it is one of the weapons that must be maintained to get loyal customers. Because there is a delivery system, the author's patience must also be maintained in order to be able to control the consumers who order.

Discussion

1. Differentiation strategy in maintaining Customer loyalty

To maintain customer loyalty, it can be done by improving product quality, the first thing to do is to continue to find out consumer needs, second, establish communication with consumers to get information, third, try to manage consumer demand well, fourth, utilize feedback from customers, fifth, control product quality to get quality products so that they can meet consumer needs, especially needs in the food sector [12].

Product quality is the whole of a product, everything that can be offered to a market to meet the wants or needs of consumers for quality products. This Gado-Gado product is one of the quality products and is able to compete in the market. Product quality is not only seen from the materials and tools used to produce, but the results of production are also part of product quality. The form of the product is easily clearly distinguished from the competitor's products, different and varied tastes and products that are the choice of consumers to consume [13].

This research effort to retain customers or increase customer loyalty involves a series of strategies and tactics designed to keep customers loyal and continue to transact with the company. Here are some common attempts [14]:

- a. Superior customer service, providing good and responsive customer service is one of the key factors in retaining customers. Make sure that customers always feel heard, appreciated, and well taken care of.
- b. Personalize the customer experience: try to get to know customers individually, understand their needs and preferences. Use existing customer data and information to provide personalized experiences, such as tailoring product recommendations or providing special offers based on their preferences.
- c. Building an attractive loyalty program can encourage customers to stay loyal. These programs can include rewards, exclusive discounts, reward points, or membership programs that provide additional value to frequent customers.
- d. Regular communication: maintain open and regular communication with customers. Provide information about new products or services, special offers, or relevant events through various communication channels such as email, text messages, social media.
- e. Consistent product and service quality Ensure that the products or services offered always meet or exceed customer expectations.
- f. Complaint management and feedback response to complaints and customer input seriously. Handle complaints quickly, act on feedback, and work to improve any identified processes or deficiencies. Providing satisfactory solutions to dissatisfied customers can help maintain their loyalty.
- g. Value added offerings provide additional value to customers by offering additional services or content that are relevant to the product or service they use. For example, providing user guides, training, or other resources that can help customers optimize their experience.
- h. Build trusting relationships, pay attention and establish strong relationships with customers.
- i. Monitor and analyze performance, continuously monitor and analyze business performance and customer satisfaction. Use data and analytics to identify areas of improvement and strengthen customer retention strategies.

In addition to product quality, the thing that needs to be done by Gado-Gado Cak Kirun businessmen is to present a taste that is different from Gado-Gado in general so that by using quality ingredients and processed in the right way, Pak Kirun gado-gado

will produce a special and unforgettable taste. The combination of savory, spicy, sweet, and sour flavors from peanut sauce combined with the fresh taste of vegetables and diverse textures will pamper the taste buds of customers and buyers.

Finally, the provision of quality service will make consumers reluctant to move to other competitors. The quality of service, especially service to consumers who order online, can be in the form of responding to messages quickly, receiving complaints and trying to provide even better service to consumers who experience poor service and products. The responsiveness between sellers and buyers must be maintained and improved. This is done so that the desires and needs of consumers can be fulfilled so that consumers feel satisfied with the services provided. In addition, providing guarantees to customers is also one way to give full confidence to consumers [15].

Being kind, friendly, polite and polite is one of the things that must be considered in the business world. Business can run well not only because of the good quality of the product but also because of the good quality of service and always paying attention to consumers. Service quality is also one of the factors in customer loyalty to a business.

2. Characteristics of Customer Loyalty to Products

Loyal customers are an important part of the success of a business. Customer loyalty is one thing that can be relied on to be able to see the future of the business being run [16].

Consumer loyalty is created through a long process, consumers seek information and learn from their experiences with a product/service. Loyal consumers will have strong feelings for certain goods because of the brand, quality, function or others. There are many reasons why traders manage consumer loyalty. At least two of these reasons need to be considered by entrepreneurs, namely: to maintain market share and marketing cost efficiency [17]:

a. Buying products repeatedly

Loyal consumers will continue to buy Gado-Gado Cak Kirun continuously. Even when not doing sales activities, consumers will ask about the existence of the product. Consumers become loyal can be influenced by several things, namely, in terms of taste, texture and product packaging. By providing quality products and in accordance with consumer desires, consumers will be reluctant to move to other sellers because they already believe in the deliciousness of Cak Kirun's Gado-Gado Culinary

b. Not influenced by other gado-gado sellers

Consumer trust must be maintained properly. Therefore, caution must be exercised during product manufacturing to ensure that no part of the product is damaged and that product quality is maintained. Loyal consumers will no longer be interested in other Pentol products, because the products they consume have fulfilled their desires and provided a sense of satisfaction [18].

c. Promote and recommend to others

Consumers who are loyal to a product share their positive experiences with others about the product they consume. This can have a greater impact than promotions run by

the seller itself. When consumers share their experiences with the product they use, this proves that the product is of high quality and encourages others to consume it [19].

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : Gado-gado Pak Kirun's marketing strategy focuses on product quality, authenticity of traditional recipes, cleanliness, and adjustable spiciness. Gado-gado has a distinctive aroma of savory sweet peanut sauce and spicy taste, with a fresh texture like a salad with peanut sauce full of various vegetables and combined with quality protein sources, carbohydrate sources, and fat sources from peanuts which are complete in one portion. In addition to being marketed directly, Gado-Gado Cak Kirun's sales are also marketed through social media, namely through WhatsApp status. That is one of the reasons consumers want to buy products because there is a delivery system. The attitude applied in serving consumers is polite, friendly and patient. Because the product is marketed directly and online, all the attitudes that have been mentioned must be applied in order to keep customers loyal. It is proven that polite, friendly and patient attitudes make consumers feel comfortable when visiting to enjoy Gado-Gado Cak Kirun. **Implication :** These findings imply that maintaining the authenticity and quality of traditional food products while integrating modern marketing tools like social media can significantly increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. The case of Gado-Gado Cak Kirun shows that the combination of sensory appeal, nutritional completeness, and excellent customer service not only enhances the dining experience but also strengthens the brand image in a competitive food market. **Limitation :** This study is limited to the marketing approach and consumer responses specific to Gado-Gado Cak Kirun, and may not fully represent the broader market dynamics of traditional food vendors across different regions. Factors such as regional taste preferences, accessibility to delivery systems, and social media usage might affect the generalizability of the results. **Future Research :** Future research could explore comparative studies between different traditional food vendors employing various digital marketing strategies to determine their effectiveness in enhancing consumer engagement and retention. In addition, further investigation into how customer service attitudes directly influence repeat purchasing behavior in traditional food contexts would provide deeper insights into consumer psychology and loyalty patterns.

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