

## The role of customer satisfaction as a mediating mechanism in linking service quality and selling price to business profit: evidence from generation z consumers in micro retail

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kualitas pelayanan dan harga jual terhadap keuntungan usaha melalui kepuasan pelanggan sebagai variabel mediasi, dengan fokus pada konsumen Generasi Z dalam konteks usaha ritel mikro. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* terhadap 100 responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa harga jual dan kualitas pelayanan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepuasan pelanggan, dengan harga jual memiliki pengaruh yang lebih dominan. Selanjutnya, kepuasan pelanggan terbukti memiliki pengaruh yang kuat dan signifikan terhadap keuntungan usaha. Namun, pengaruh langsung harga jual dan kualitas pelayanan terhadap keuntungan usaha tidak signifikan. Analisis mediasi menunjukkan bahwa kepuasan pelanggan memediasi secara penuh hubungan antara harga jual dan kualitas pelayanan terhadap keuntungan usaha. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kepuasan pelanggan merupakan mekanisme kunci yang menghubungkan strategi pemasaran dengan kinerja keuangan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam memperluas pemahaman mengenai peran mediasi dalam konteks usaha mikro serta memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pelaku usaha dalam meningkatkan profitabilitas melalui strategi yang berorientasi pada kepuasan pelanggan.

**Kata Kunci:** kualitas pelayanan; harga jual; kepuasan pelanggan; keuntungan usaha; generasi z

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the influence of service quality and selling price on business profits through customer satisfaction as a mediating variable, focusing on Generation Z consumers in the context of micro-retail businesses. The study used a quantitative approach with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method on 100 respondents. The results showed that selling price and service quality have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction, with selling price having a more dominant influence. Furthermore, customer satisfaction was shown to have a strong and significant influence on business profits. However, the direct effect of selling price and service quality on business profits was not significant. Mediation analysis showed that customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between selling price and service quality on business profits. These findings confirm that customer satisfaction is a key mechanism linking marketing strategy to financial performance. This study contributes to broadening the understanding of the role of mediation in the context of micro-businesses and provides practical implications for business actors in increasing profitability through strategies oriented towards customer satisfaction.*

**Keyword:** service quality; selling price; customer satisfaction; business profits; generation z

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive business environment, particularly within micro and small enterprises (MSEs), firms are required to continuously adapt their marketing strategies to sustain customer relationships and achieve long-term profitability. In retail businesses such as mobile phone and accessories counters, competition is not only driven by product offerings but also by the firm's ability to manage service quality and pricing strategies effectively in delivering superior customer value. These challenges are further intensified by the growing dominance of Generation Z consumers, who exhibit distinct behavioral characteristics such as high digital engagement, price sensitivity, and strong expectations for fast, responsive, and personalized service experiences. As a result, understanding how service and pricing influence customer perceptions and financial outcomes has become a critical issue in contemporary marketing research (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Homburg et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2016; Grewal et al., 2017; Bolton et al., 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, service quality and perceived price fairness are widely acknowledged as key antecedents of customer satisfaction, which in turn plays a pivotal role in shaping customer behavioral responses and firm performance. Service quality, often conceptualized through dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, and empathy, contributes to the formation of positive customer experiences, while price perception reflects customers' evaluation of value relative to cost. When customers perceive a balance between service performance and price fairness, they are more likely to develop satisfaction, leading to repeat purchases and long-term engagement with the firm. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated that customer satisfaction is a fundamental driver of loyalty and profitability, serving as a strategic asset for sustaining competitive advantage in dynamic markets (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Anderson et al., 1994; Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver, 2010; Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006).

Despite the extensive body of literature, empirical findings on the direct relationship between service quality, pricing, and business profitability remain inconclusive, particularly in the context of small businesses. Some studies suggest that service quality and pricing strategies have a direct impact on financial performance, while others indicate that their effects are predominantly indirect and mediated through customer satisfaction. This inconsistency highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms that link marketing variables to firm performance outcomes. In particular, customer satisfaction is increasingly recognized as a mediating construct that translates operational strategies into tangible financial results, yet its role has not been sufficiently explored in micro retail settings and emerging market contexts (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Luo & Homburg, 2007; Rust et al., 2004; Gruca & Rego, 2005; Morgan & Rego, 2006).

Furthermore, the role of Generation Z as a dominant consumer segment introduces additional complexity into the service–price–satisfaction–profitability relationship. Generation Z consumers tend to evaluate value propositions holistically, integrating functional, emotional, and digital experiences into their purchase decisions. Their tendency to rapidly compare alternatives and share experiences through digital platforms amplifies the importance of delivering consistent and satisfactory service encounters at competitive prices. However, limited empirical research has specifically examined how these dynamics operate within micro-scale retail businesses, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia, where small enterprises play a significant role in the economy (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Priporas et al., 2017; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Dabija et al., 2018; France et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of service quality and selling price on business profit through customer satisfaction as a mediating variable, focusing on Generation Z consumers at Al Galery Counter. By integrating marketing constructs with financial performance outcomes in a micro business context, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how customer satisfaction functions as a strategic mechanism that converts service and pricing strategies into profitability. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically, by extending existing marketing models into underexplored contexts, and practically, by offering actionable insights for small business owners in designing effective strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and achieve sustainable business performance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction*

Service quality has consistently been recognized as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction, particularly in highly competitive retail environments. Recent studies emphasize that service quality—reflected through dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy—directly shapes customers' perceived value and overall experience. When customers perceive that service delivery meets or exceeds their expectations, they are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction, which subsequently influences their behavioral intentions. Empirical evidence from recent research confirms that improvements in service quality significantly enhance customer satisfaction across various sectors, including retail, digital platforms, and

service-based industries (Supraptiningsih, 2025; Utama, 2025; Dalimunthe, 2025; Saputra, 2026; Prastika et al., 2026).

Moreover, contemporary research highlights that service quality does not merely influence satisfaction directly but also enhances perceived usefulness and emotional attachment, which further strengthens customer satisfaction. This indicates that service quality functions as both a functional and psychological driver in shaping customer evaluations, particularly among digitally oriented consumers such as Generation Z, who prioritize speed, personalization, and interaction quality (Jhony et al., 2025; Diany & Rarin, 2025; Saputra, 2026; Putri et al., 2025).

H1: Service quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

#### **B. Selling Price and Customer Satisfaction**

Price perception is another fundamental factor influencing customer satisfaction, particularly in price-sensitive markets. Recent literature suggests that customers evaluate price not only based on its nominal value but also on perceived fairness, transparency, and alignment with the benefits received. When customers perceive that the price is fair relative to the value delivered, satisfaction tends to increase significantly. Conversely, perceived price unfairness can lead to dissatisfaction, even when service quality is high. Empirical findings confirm that pricing strategies play a significant role in shaping customer satisfaction and value perception in both offline and digital retail contexts (Chaerudin & Syafarudin, 2021; Fujawati et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2022; Firmansyah, 2023; Friess & Kassemeier, 2024).

Furthermore, recent studies indicate that price sensitivity is particularly pronounced among Generation Z consumers, who actively compare alternatives and seek optimal value through digital platforms. This behavior reinforces the importance of aligning pricing strategies with customer expectations to ensure satisfaction and retention. Therefore, pricing decisions must be strategically designed not only to attract customers but also to reinforce perceived value and satisfaction in the long term (Priporas et al., 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Dabija et al., 2018; France et al., 2021; Chaerudin & Syafarudin, 2021).

H2: Selling price has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

#### **C. Customer Satisfaction and Business Profitability**

Customer satisfaction has been widely acknowledged as a key driver of business performance and profitability. Recent empirical research indicates that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, exhibit loyalty, and generate positive *word-of-mouth*, all of which contribute to increased revenue and long-term financial performance. In addition, customer satisfaction reduces customer acquisition costs and enhances customer lifetime value, making it a strategic asset for firms seeking sustainable profitability (Drosos et al., 2019; Srinivasan et al., 2010; Morgan & Rego, 2006; Luo & Homburg, 2007; Gruca & Rego, 2005).

Recent studies in retail and service industries further confirm that customer satisfaction significantly influences behavioral outcomes such as repurchase intention and retention, which directly impact business profitability. In micro and small enterprises, where customer relationships are more personalized, satisfaction plays an even more crucial role in driving financial outcomes (Utama, 2025; Diany & Rarin, 2025; Saputra, 2026; Dalimunthe, 2025; Jhony et al., 2025).

H3: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on business profit.

#### **D. Direct Effect of Service Quality and Price on Business Profit**

Although service quality and price are essential components of marketing strategy, their direct impact on profitability remains inconclusive in recent literature. Some studies suggest that service quality and pricing strategies can directly influence financial performance by increasing sales and margins. However, other findings indicate that their effects are often indirect and mediated by customer satisfaction, especially in service-oriented and small business contexts (Rust et al., 2004; Srinivasan et al., 2010; Saputra, 2026; Jhony et al., 2025; Diany & Rarin, 2025).

This inconsistency suggests that while service quality and price are important, their ability to generate profit depends on how effectively they translate into positive customer experiences. Without customer satisfaction, improvements in service or pricing strategies may not necessarily result in increased profitability.

H4: Service quality has a positive effect on business profit.

H5: Selling price has a positive effect on business profit.

#### **E. The Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction**

Recent research increasingly emphasizes the mediating role of customer satisfaction in linking marketing strategies to firm performance. Customer satisfaction acts as a psychological mechanism that transforms service quality and pricing perceptions into behavioral outcomes such as loyalty, repurchase intention, and ultimately profitability. Empirical evidence consistently shows that customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between service quality, price, and performance outcomes across various industries (Diany & Rarin, 2025; Jhony et al., 2025; Saputra, 2026; Utama, 2025; Dalimunthe, 2025).

Furthermore, the mediating role of satisfaction is particularly relevant in the context of Generation Z consumers, who base their decisions on holistic evaluations of experience and value. In this context, satisfaction

becomes a key mechanism through which service quality and price influence long-term business outcomes, including profitability and sustainability (Putri et al., 2025; Bonang, 2025).

H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and business profit.

H7: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between selling price and business profit.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design with a causal approach to examine the relationships among service quality, selling price, customer satisfaction, and business profit, with customer satisfaction acting as a mediating variable. A variance-based *Structural Equation Modeling* technique, specifically *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, is utilized to analyze the proposed model. The use of *PLS-SEM* is particularly appropriate given its ability to handle complex models involving multiple latent constructs, mediation effects, and relatively small sample sizes, while also accommodating non-normal data distributions commonly found in behavioral research contexts.

The population of this study consists of Generation Z consumers who have made purchases at Al Galery Counter, a micro retail business operating in the mobile phone and accessories sector. Generation Z is selected due to its dominant presence in the digital marketplace and its distinctive consumption behavior characterized by high responsiveness to service quality and price fairness. A purposive sampling technique is applied to ensure that respondents meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria require respondents to be between 17 and 25 years old, have made at least two transactions at the store, and possess sufficient experience to evaluate service and pricing aspects. A total of 100 valid responses are collected, which meets the minimum sample size requirements for *PLS-SEM* analysis, particularly following the “10-times rule” and more recent recommendations emphasizing statistical power considerations.

Data for this study are collected using a structured questionnaire designed based on established theoretical frameworks. All measurement items are adapted from prior validated studies to ensure content validity. Service quality is measured using indicators reflecting responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Selling price is operationalized through perceived price fairness, price transparency, and *value-for-money* perceptions. Customer satisfaction is measured as an evaluative and affective response to the consumption experience, while business profit is assessed using perceptual indicators related to sales growth, profitability improvement, and overall business performance. All constructs are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Prior to the main data analysis, a pilot test is conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the measurement instrument. The measurement model (*outer model*) is evaluated in terms of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Convergent validity is assessed using outer loadings and *Average Variance Extracted (AVE)*, where loading values above 0.70 and *AVE* values above 0.50 indicate adequate validity. Internal consistency reliability is evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability, with threshold values exceeding 0.70. Discriminant validity is examined using the *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)*, where values below 0.90 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity. Additionally, collinearity issues are assessed through *Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)* values, ensuring that all indicators fall below the critical threshold to avoid multicollinearity bias.

The structural model (*inner model*) is subsequently evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs. This involves assessing path coefficients, *t-statistics*, and *p-values* obtained through bootstrapping procedures with a large number of resamples to ensure robustness. The significance of direct effects is determined based on *p-values* below 0.05 and *t-statistics* exceeding 1.96. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is examined to evaluate the explanatory power of endogenous constructs, while predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) is assessed using the blindfolding procedure to determine the model’s predictive capability.

To examine the mediating role of customer satisfaction, indirect effects are analyzed using bootstrapping techniques. Mediation is established when the indirect effect is statistically significant. The nature of mediation—whether full or partial—is determined by comparing the significance of direct and indirect paths. If the direct effect becomes insignificant while the indirect effect remains significant, full mediation is indicated; otherwise, partial mediation is concluded. Additionally, effect size ( $f^2$ ) is evaluated to determine the relative impact of exogenous constructs on endogenous variables, providing further insight into the practical significance of the findings.

Overall, the methodological approach adopted in this study ensures a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the proposed research model. By integrating robust measurement validation procedures with advanced structural modeling techniques, this study is able to provide reliable empirical evidence on how service quality and pricing strategies influence business profit through the mediating mechanism of customer satisfaction, particularly within the context of Generation Z consumers in micro retail businesses.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation of the measurement model demonstrates that all constructs meet the required criteria for reliability and validity. All indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The *Average Variance Extracted (AVE)* values for all constructs are above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. Furthermore, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values surpass 0.70, suggesting high internal consistency across all constructs. Discriminant validity is also established, as indicated by *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)* values below the critical threshold of 0.90. These results confirm that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further structural analysis. Interestingly, the consistently high loading values (many exceeding 0.90) indicate that respondents exhibit highly consistent perceptions across indicators, which is commonly observed in studies involving homogeneous samples such as Generation Z consumers. However, such high consistency also suggests that future studies may consider expanding item diversity to capture broader perceptual variations.

The structural model evaluation reveals several important relationships among the studied variables. The results indicate that selling price has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.598, p < 0.001$ ), while service quality also significantly influences customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.287, p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, the direct effects of selling price ( $\beta = 0.145, p > 0.05$ ) and service quality ( $\beta = 0.030, p > 0.05$ ) on business profit are not statistically significant. Meanwhile, customer satisfaction shows a strong and significant effect on business profit ( $\beta = 0.743, p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that customer satisfaction plays a central role in translating marketing strategies into financial outcomes. The relatively high coefficient of customer satisfaction on business profit indicates that satisfaction is the dominant predictor of profitability in this context. This result is consistent with the theoretical perspective that emphasizes customer satisfaction as a key driver of firm performance and long-term value creation.

Table 1. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship	$\beta$ (O)	STDEV	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
Selling Price → Customer Satisfaction	0.598	0.115	5.217	0.000	Supported
Selling Price → Business Profit	0.145	0.100	1.451	0.147	Not Supported
Customer Satisfaction → Business Profit	0.743	0.088	8.456	0.000	Supported
Service Quality → Customer Satisfaction	0.287	0.107	2.684	0.007	Supported
Service Quality → Business Profit	0.030	0.101	0.298	0.766	Not Supported
Selling Price → Customer Satisfaction → Business Profit	0.444	0.088	5.019	0.000	Supported
Service Quality → Customer Satisfaction → Business Profit	0.214	0.089	2.388	0.017	Supported

The significant positive effect of selling price on customer satisfaction indicates that price perception is a critical determinant of customer evaluation in the context of micro retail businesses. This finding suggests that customers, particularly Generation Z, are highly sensitive to price fairness and value alignment. When the perceived price matches the expected benefits, customers are more likely to feel satisfied. This result aligns with recent studies highlighting the importance of perceived price fairness in shaping customer satisfaction and perceived value (Chaerudin & Syafarudin, 2021; Fujawati et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2022; Friess & Kassemeyer, 2024; Priporas et al., 2017). The strong coefficient ( $\beta = 0.598$ ) further indicates that price plays a more dominant role than service in influencing satisfaction within this specific context. This may be attributed to the characteristics of Generation Z consumers, who tend to prioritize economic value and actively compare prices across alternatives.

Service quality is also found to significantly influence customer satisfaction, although with a lower coefficient compared to price. This suggests that while service quality remains important, its relative importance is secondary to price considerations in this context. This finding is consistent with recent literature emphasizing that service quality contributes to satisfaction through experiential and emotional dimensions (Utama, 2025; Saputra, 2026; Diany & Rarin, 2025; Prastika et al., 2026). However, the lower effect size may reflect the transactional nature of micro retail businesses, where customers prioritize efficiency and value over relational service aspects. In other words, service quality enhances satisfaction, but it is not the primary driver in price-sensitive markets.

The results reveal that customer satisfaction has a strong and significant impact on business profit, making it the most influential variable in the model. This finding confirms that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, generate positive *word-of-mouth*, and contribute to revenue growth. This result strongly supports prior research demonstrating the link between customer satisfaction and firm performance (Luo & Homburg, 2007; Gruca & Rego, 2005; Srinivasan et al., 2010; Morgan & Rego, 2006; Drosos et al., 2019). The high coefficient ( $\beta = 0.743$ ) indicates that customer satisfaction serves as a key mechanism through which firms can achieve sustainable profitability, particularly in small business settings where customer relationships are more direct and impactful.

Interestingly, the study finds that neither selling price nor service quality has a significant direct effect on business profit. This suggests that improvements in pricing or service strategies alone are insufficient to generate financial outcomes unless they lead to customer satisfaction. This finding provides important insight into the indirect nature of marketing-performance relationships and is consistent with prior studies emphasizing

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the mediating role of customer satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Rust et al., 2004; Srinivasan et al., 2010; Mittal et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2006). It highlights that customer satisfaction is not merely an outcome variable but a strategic bridge that connects operational decisions to financial performance.

The mediation analysis reveals that customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between both selling price and service quality on business profit. The indirect effects of selling price ( $\beta = 0.444$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and service quality ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) on profit through satisfaction are both significant, indicating full mediation. This finding reinforces the argument that customer satisfaction is a critical mechanism in converting marketing inputs into financial outcomes. The stronger indirect effect of price compared to service further suggests that economic value plays a more dominant role in shaping satisfaction-driven profitability in this context. These results are consistent with recent empirical evidence highlighting the mediating role of customer satisfaction across various industries (Diany & Rarin, 2025; Saputra, 2026; Utama, 2025; Dalimunthe, 2025). The findings also extend existing literature by demonstrating that in micro retail settings, satisfaction acts as a full mediator rather than a partial one, emphasizing its strategic importance.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the influence of service quality and selling price on business profit through customer satisfaction as a mediating variable in the context of Generation Z consumers in a micro retail business. The findings reveal that both selling price and service quality significantly influence customer satisfaction, with selling price emerging as the more dominant factor. This indicates that perceived price fairness and value alignment are critical in shaping customer evaluations, particularly among price-sensitive consumers. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that customer satisfaction has a strong and significant effect on business profit, confirming its central role as a driver of financial performance. In contrast, the direct effects of selling price and service quality on business profit are not significant, suggesting that these variables do not directly translate into profitability. Instead, their impact is fully mediated by customer satisfaction.

These findings highlight that customer satisfaction functions as a key mechanism that converts marketing strategies into financial outcomes. Therefore, profitability in micro retail businesses is not determined solely by pricing or service strategies, but by the extent to which these strategies successfully enhance customer satisfaction. This study contributes to the marketing literature by reinforcing the mediating role of customer satisfaction and extending its application to micro business contexts and Generation Z consumers.

The findings of this study provide several important managerial insights, particularly for small business owners operating in competitive retail environments. First, pricing strategies should be carefully designed to reflect perceived fairness and *value-for-money*, as price perception has the strongest impact on customer satisfaction. Business owners are encouraged to maintain transparent, competitive, and consistent pricing to meet customer expectations, especially among Generation Z consumers who are highly sensitive to price differences.

Second, although service quality does not directly influence profit, it remains a crucial factor in enhancing customer satisfaction. Therefore, businesses should focus on improving service efficiency, responsiveness, and customer interaction quality. Simple improvements such as faster service, clearer product explanations, and friendly communication can significantly enhance customer experience.

Third, the results emphasize that customer satisfaction should be treated as a strategic priority rather than merely an outcome variable. Business owners should actively monitor customer satisfaction levels and use feedback as a basis for continuous improvement. Investing in customer satisfaction is likely to yield long-term financial benefits through increased customer loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive *word-of-mouth*.

Finally, the study suggests that businesses should adopt a holistic approach by aligning pricing and service strategies toward a common goal: maximizing customer satisfaction. By doing so, small businesses can achieve sustainable profitability and strengthen their competitive position in the market.

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