

Strategi Salon Kecantikan Kompetitif: Pengetahuan Profesional, Kompetensi Manajemen, Keterampilan Hubungan, dan Pengalaman Praktis

Competitive Beauty Salon Strategies: Professional Knowledge, Management Competencies, Relationship Skills, and Practical Experience

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Abstract

This study investigates how professional knowledge, operational management skills, strategic insight, relationship-building competence, and practical experience influence the competitive strength of beauty salons. Competitiveness was evaluated based on customer perceptions. A quantitative methodology was adopted, using questionnaires to collect data from 110 beauty salon owners or managers in the Jakarta region. The collected data were then analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling, employing the Partial Least Squares method (SmartPLS 4). The findings indicate that professional knowledge has a significant positive impact on competitiveness compared to other businesses, and its influence is crucial for shaping customer perspectives. However, operational management competencies did not demonstrate a substantial impact on enhancing the company's competitiveness. Conversely, relationship skills competencies and practical experience significantly and positively influence competitiveness, with practical experience emerging as the strongest factor. Further studies are suggested to reconsider the use of operational management competencies as a variable or replace them with more relevant factors that directly shape customer perceptions and enhance efficiency to build a strong salon competitiveness. Furthermore, an emphasis on strategies focused on differentiation and agility of service providers in salons is crucial in responding to competition in the market share of beauty service providers, especially salons.

Keywords: *Professional Knowledge, Operations Management Competencies, Competitiveness, Relationship Skills, Practical Experience, Competitive Advantage*

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana pengetahuan profesional, keterampilan manajemen operasional, kompetensi keterampilan hubungan, kompetensi membangun hubungan, dan pengalaman praktis memengaruhi kekuatan kompetitif salon kecantikan. Daya saing dievaluasi berdasarkan persepsi pelanggan. Metodologi kuantitatif diadopsi, menggunakan kuesioner untuk mengumpulkan data dari 110 pemilik atau manajer salon kecantikan di wilayah Jakarta. Data yang dikumpulkan kemudian dianalisis melalui Structural Equation Modeling, menggunakan metode Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS 4). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengetahuan profesional memiliki dampak positif yang signifikan terhadap daya saing dibandingkan dengan bisnis lain, dan pengaruhnya sangat penting untuk membangun perspektif pelanggan. Namun, keterampilan manajemen operasional tidak menunjukkan dampak substansial pada peningkatan daya saing perusahaan. Sebaliknya, keterampilan membangun hubungan, dan pengalaman praktis secara signifikan dan positif memengaruhi daya saing, dengan pengalaman praktis muncul sebagai faktor terkuat. Studi selanjutnya disarankan untuk mempertimbangkan kembali penggunaan keterampilan manajemen operasional sebagai variabel, atau menggantinya dengan faktor yang lebih relevan yang secara langsung membentuk persepsi pelanggan dan meningkatkan efisiensi guna membangun daya saing

salon yang kuat. Selain itu, penekanan pada strategi yang berfokus pada diferensiasi dan kelincihan penyedia layanan di salon menjadi sangat penting dalam menanggapi persaingan di pangsa pasar penyedia layanan kecantikan khususnya salon.

Kata Kunci: Pengetahuan Profesional, Kompetensi Manajemen Operasional, Keterampilan Membangun Hubungan, Pengalaman Praktis, Keunggulan Kompetitif.

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Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are crucial to the Indonesian economy. MSMEs do not exist in isolation, and the growth of the MSME sector significantly contributes to improving public welfare. MSMEs contribute approximately 60% of total state revenue, with 65.46 million businesses across Indonesia (Kemenkeu, 2024). MSMEs provide employment for 117 million Indonesians, accounting for 97% of the country's population (Siagian & Manday, 2024). Based on MSME investment data in Indonesia in 2024, there were 2,411,359 micro and small business projects, divided into 2,206,932 micro business projects and 204,418 small business projects. The total investment reached 127 trillion rupiah. Furthermore, MSMEs in Indonesia successfully absorbed 4,696,618 workers.

Based on data from Kemenkeu (2024), the largest investment in Micro and Small Enterprises is located on the island of Java, specifically in five provinces: West Java (492,889 MSEs), DKI Jakarta (169,893 MSEs), East Java (360,395 MSEs), Central Java (214,946 MSEs), and Banten (113,576 MSEs). These five provinces are the main driving areas for investment and development of MSEs in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in terms of the industrial sector, the trade and services sector shows the highest number of MSEs with 994,149 MSEs in this sector, followed by other services with 234,552 MSEs, construction with 64,246 MSEs, hotels and restaurants with 48,040 MSEs, and the food, plantation and livestock sector with 106,302 MSEs. Overall, West Java is the largest center for MSE investment. One part of the service sector that not only absorbs a large workforce but also continues to grow is the beauty industry. The beauty industry in Indonesia itself grows rapidly every year, with growth reaching 21.9% in 2023 and is predicted to continue to increase (Bisnisia, 2025). This growth is driven by trends created by beauty influencers on various social media platforms. The development of the beauty industry through these social media trends demonstrates that people's tastes and needs for beauty are increasingly diverse. This is also evidenced by the sharp increase in requests for certification in the beauty industry from the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM), which will reach nearly 400,000 by 2024 (Media Indonesia, 2024).

As part of the beauty industry, the beauty salon business is also growing rapidly. Technological advancements and shifting lifestyle preferences are significantly driving growth within the beauty sector. Both men and women are now highly concerned about their appearance and strive to look attractive through various beauty treatments. One type of business in this sector is the beauty salon. Beauty salons offer a wide range of services, from head to toe. Although salons are traditionally associated with women, more and more men are now utilizing their services (Sitinjak et al., 2021). As the beauty industry continues to grow, competition within it is also intensifying. One of the challenges facing MSMEs entering this market is that future businesses will become increasingly complex and competitive. Business success can be measured by a company's ability to adapt to changing times (Ghafari, 2024). The beauty industry is growing rapidly, as evidenced by the numerous beauty salons that have sprung up. This encourages

continued growth due to increasing customer demand (Burhanuddin & Husda, 2024).

In accordance with the growing number of MSMEs in the beauty industry, particularly beauty salons, which are increasingly thriving along with increasing public awareness of the importance of self-care and aesthetics, a new challenge has emerged that increasingly fierce competition among business actors. Beauty salon MSMEs face significant challenges in maintaining their competitiveness, particularly due to constantly changing beauty trends, increasing customer expectations, and the adoption of technology in salon services (Nathisarasia & Jr, 2024). Amidst this increasingly fierce competition, companies need to maintain their customers. Retaining loyal customers is crucial because it can provide a competitive advantage. Furthermore, it also helps maintain market share and long-term financial performance (Suryatenggara & Dahlan, 2022). This can only be achieved if beauty salon MSEs innovate not only in products but also in services tailored to market orientation (Anatasia, 2023). Market orientation refers to a company's proactive strategy of understanding competition, committing to innovation, and focusing on customer satisfaction by meeting consumer needs and preferences for a product (Pangguna et al., 2024). Consequently, beauty salon MSEs need to understand consumers consumption trends to achieve superior competitiveness.

Furthermore, companies must not only understand external factors but also understand the demands of change within the company. These factors include the quality of human resources, management capabilities, organizational and technological structures, the entrepreneurial competencies of the company owners, and internal environmental support for innovation. A company's success depends heavily on its ability to manage both external and internal factors (Ghafari, 2024). This aligns with research conducted by Cong et al. (2021) on how leadership competencies influence the competitiveness of MSMEs in the tourism sector. The results of this study indicate that in the service industry, leadership skills and resource management capabilities play a crucial role in enhancing a company's competitiveness in the market. Leaders continually strive to enhance their company's internal capabilities to strengthen their ability to face external factors (Hoang et al., 2024). Maintaining competitiveness through effective strategies in a challenging social environment is crucial. This can be achieved by combining services provided by humans and technology. Therefore, professional work must focus on human resources, the core resource of an organization.

Essentially, every individual in an organization relies on top management for efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, management leadership characteristics, psychological aspects, and competencies are also key factors in successfully achieving organizational goals (Shin & Park, 2024). Leadership competencies, including **professional knowledge, operational management competencies, relationship skills competencies, and practical experiences**, have a positive and significant influence on MSME performance from a customer perspective (Setiani et al., 2023).

One important aspect of leadership competency is professional knowledge. The characteristics of a salon manager, including professional knowledge, influence differentiation strategies and technology development in the beauty industry. Good management and expertise in beauty technology can enhance salon competitiveness (Shin & Park, 2024). Conversely, research conducted by Karuga et al. (2021) shows that there are potential negative impacts if knowledge is not managed properly. Collecting excessive and irrelevant information can waste valuable time and resources, while information overload can hinder informed decision-making. Furthermore, knowledge that is not applied in real-world situations will not provide meaningful benefits to the business. Costs associated with collecting and managing knowledge, such as training or information resources, can also be a financial burden for MSMEs with limited resources. Therefore, it is important for MSMEs to manage their professional knowledge strategically, focusing on relevant information, effective implementation, and prudent cost management to maximize benefits and minimize potential losses.

Besides professional knowledge, efficiency in operational management is also crucial.

Companies implement operational strategies that align with their internal competencies when operating in a rapidly changing environment. In this environment, market forces are expected to play a significant role in the type of strategy adopted by companies. Companies must be able to identify mismatches between environmental needs and internal operations and develop appropriate strategies to respond (Wandiga & Ngila, 2024). Leaders with sound operational strategies can increase efficiency and create sustainable competitive advantage (Anatasia et al, 2023; Wandiga & Ngila, 2024). However, Cotelnic (2023) stated that service industry companies that rely too heavily on manual operations management and do not adopt technology will gradually experience a decline in competitiveness. Therefore, highly competitive operational management can be achieved if the company's operations consistently innovate to keep up with the times and its human resources have the capability to master these changes.

Because salons are a service-based business, they require nurturing relationships, not just with suppliers, customers, and fellow service providers (Tegor et al., 2023). A leadership strategy oriented toward collaboration with business partners and suppliers supports service innovation and business growth (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Sembiring et al. (2023) also noted that building strong relationships with customers, suppliers, and business partners can increase customer loyalty and business sustainability. However, research suggests that managerial competency is more effective in enhancing competitiveness than simply establishing internal and external relationships (Igwe et al., 2024). Relationships with customers or business partners do not always guarantee increased competitiveness in highly competitive sectors (Mairizal & Taufik, 2023). Internal relationship competency also does not always directly impact a company's competitiveness (Kamna & Ilkhanizadeh, 2022).

The service industry sector, whose competitive advantage is focused on the services provided, requires service providers not only to possess superior competency in their field, but also to possess greater expertise. The more experience they gain in providing services, the more proficient they become (Hoang et al., 2024). This experience is gained by service providers through frequent transactional activities. The more direct experience leaders and employees have within a company, the more they can better understand customer needs, the more positive the company's competitiveness will be. However, research conducted by Mishra et al. (2023) states that transformational leadership has a greater impact on competitiveness than direct experience. Long work experience does not always increase a company's competitiveness if it is not balanced with an adaptive and innovative leadership approach.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on MSMEs competitiveness, few specifically address how professional knowledge, operational management competencies, relationship skills competencies, and practical experience, either individually or simultaneously, influence the competitiveness of MSEs in the beauty salon sector. Therefore, this study aims to enrich the literature on leadership competencies and their impact on the competitiveness of MSEs, particularly in the beauty salon sector. This study will explore how these four factors can contribute to improving the competitiveness of beauty salons.

Literature Review

Leadership

Organizational competitiveness is a multifaceted concept encompassing various factors such as innovation, operational efficiency, strategic management, and the skills and knowledge of employees (Igwe et al., 2024). Competitiveness refers to a company's ability to produce products or services in a superior manner compared to its competitors. This capability is crucial in the global marketplace, where customers typically have the ability to select what they need from a variety of available options. Consequently, companies across various sectors invariably compete to secure customers, support, and a favorable position in the perception of the public familiar with their brand (Tomalá et al., 2022).

Within every company, there exists a leader who organizes and manages the resources within the company. The term "leader" refers to an individual who possesses the authority to direct subordinates in completing portions of their tasks to achieve objectives. A leader is someone who understands the appropriate expectations and values for the organization. With the ability to influence how others think, behave, and feel, the leader motivates individuals and resources to achieve organizational goals. Effective leadership is that which can integrate task orientation with human relations orientation. The qualities of a leader greatly influence an institution's ability to excel and achieve its objectives. However, leadership and management are often regarded as the same thing, although they are not always aligned. Nevertheless, leadership and management are complementary, not mutually exclusive. In a simplified context, leaders set the institution's goals, while managers are responsible for devising ways to achieve those goals (Adawiah et al., 2024). Good leadership from a leader can build a company's competitive advantage, which ultimately can improve the company's competitiveness.

Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge is defined as a deep understanding of the theories and practices related to a specific field of work, acquired through formal education and work experience. This knowledge enables individuals to manage human resources effectively to achieve organizational goals (Nasril et al., 2021). Professional knowledge can be realized in the ability to develop a business. Business development can be carried out through preparing the company to face changes in the business environment and dynamic competition so that the company can continue to compete and maintain its sustainability (Sagala et al, 2024).

This is certainly related to the ability to analyze the market and competitors, which requires an understanding of consumer needs and preferences, as well as the strategies used by competitors. Professional knowledge enables companies to identify opportunities and threats and develop effective strategies to compete in the market (Muniarty et al, 2022).

Moreover, professional knowledge is also reflected in a company's marketing decision-making. Marketing is a managerial process that aims to meet consumer needs and desires through the creation, offering, and exchange of valuable products or services. This includes various activities such as market research, product development, pricing, promotion, and distribution (Lesmana et al., 2022). Professional knowledge is also reflected in business owners who understand the meaning of corporate social responsibility towards the community and the surrounding environment. This is done by ensuring that business operations do not harm the community or the ecosystem in which the business is located. Engagement with society and communities, as well as attention to the environment, reflects corporate social responsibility. Service companies that are active in community activities and implement environmentally friendly practices can enhance brand image and customer loyalty (Anatasia et al, 2025).

Operational Management Competencies

Operational management competence is the ability of leaders to effectively oversee and manage nearly all operational aspects of a business, although often limited by a focus on short-term tasks. Company leaders can manage and lead organizations effectively only if they have in-depth knowledge of their business areas. In addition to basic knowledge, leaders also need to have a desire to continue learning to enhance awareness, knowledge, and update the latest information to develop competence in managerial and entrepreneurial aspects. The role of leaders is crucial in establishing, maintaining, and developing sustainable organizations (Cong et al., 2021).

Operational management competence also refers to the ability of company leaders to manage all units in the company, referring to the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling resources and activities in various units or departments within the company to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently (Febrianty et al., 2023). Furthermore, this competence also means leading the company, which is not only characterized by the ability to

direct but also by the capacity to build trust, motivate, and inspire employees to actively engage. Successful leaders are able to create a work environment that supports change through open communication, leading by example, and empowering employees so that they are ready and committed to achieving organizational goals (Musaigwa, 2023).

The managerial process is inseparable from the process of evaluating company activities. Evaluating company activities is the process of assessing the performance of various functions and processes within the organization to ensure compliance with established standards and strategic objectives (Febrianty et al., 2023). Evaluating activities within a company is an unavoidable process in the modern work environment. It is key to measuring the extent to which employee achievements meet company expectations. However, more than just an administrative routine, performance evaluation plays an important role in individual development and the overall success of the organization (Manurung et al., 2024). The evaluation process is also expected to enable the company to adjust its business areas to adapt to changes in the dynamic market and business environment. In this case, adjusting the company's business areas can be done through modifications to products, services, or business models to remain relevant and competitive (Sumarsid et al., 2023).

Relationship Skills Competencies

Relationship-building skills competence is the ability of leaders to establish and develop effective relationships with various parties (partners, customers, suppliers, internal organization, administrative institutions for business continuity), effective communication, support for diversity, and the development of a culture of innovation (Cong et al., 2021).

In this era of globalization, building business relationships is crucial for business survival. Successful business leaders must have a forward-looking perspective in building relationships, as well as the ability to communicate effectively. This competence can be measured by the ability of leaders within the company to build internal relationships by creating effective communication and collaboration among employees and departments. This is important for improving operational efficiency and creating a harmonious work environment (Muhammad et al., 2024). In addition to relationships within the company, customer integration within the supply chain is also important. This involves developing long-term strategic partnerships between companies and their suppliers, with the aim of enhancing collaboration, innovation, and supply chain resilience. Close relationships between buyers and suppliers can create significant value and help make the supply chain more resilient (Gutierrez et al., 2020).

One relationship that is also crucial to maintain is how to integrate customer needs into the supply chain process to understand and meet needs more effectively, which can improve supply chain performance. Customer integration allows companies to respond better to changing demands and increase customer satisfaction (Aslam et al., 2023). The ability to build relationships with partners, customers, suppliers, and internal company members is also important. Support for employee diversity also has a positive impact on business performance. In addition, leaders need to create a culture of innovation so that employees think creatively. Good relationships with local government are also important. The quality of business relationships has a direct impact on business outcomes.

Practical Experience

Practical experience is experience gained from one's own activities in real situation. Practical experience is very beneficial because individuals experience it themselves, thus the possibility of perceptual errors can be avoided (Nanda et al., 2024). Experiential Learning requires a person to experience the stages in the learning process in order to remember and understand the delivered skills material (soft skills).

Practical experience in various managerial positions allows individuals to develop leadership skills and a deep understanding of company operations. Studies show that diverse and

challenging work experiences contribute positively to work performance through increased information-seeking behavior (Cao & Hamori, 2023). Experience holding various managerial positions in a company refers to the accumulation of knowledge and skills acquired through various managerial roles within the company. Both very little and a great deal of prior managerial experience demonstrates better performance compared to those with moderate levels of experience (Desai, 2023). Moreover, direct experience in terms of manager involvement in the decision-making process and strategy implementation can help companies overcome challenges or crises faced. This ability is important in ensuring organizational effectiveness and adaptability to changes in the business environment (Dler & Tawfeq, 2021).

Practical experience can also arise because someone holds a position for a certain period, thus providing an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge into practice, which is known as experiential learning. This process generates knowledge and skills through a combination of direct experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application of learned ideas to make decisions or solve problems (Wart et al., 2020).

Competitiveness

Company competitiveness and performance from the customer's perspective is the customer's evaluation of the quality of an MSME's products or services compared to their expectations. This is an indicator of how well the MSME meets the needs and desires of customers, which is reflected in: First, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of customers regarding the extent to which purchased products or services meet their needs, as well as an assessment of whether the time and money spent on the purchase and consumption have been well spent. Second, customer loyalty, which is a measure of the likelihood of customers doing repeat business with a company or brand. An increase in customer loyalty compared to the previous year indicates that customers increasingly trust and continuously choose the company's products or services (Budiyono & Sutianingsih, 2021; Anatasia et al, 2016). Third, customers are more interested in products or services. Customer interest in a company's products or services can be increased through various marketing strategies, such as effective promotions, improved product quality, and competitive pricing adjustments. Increased interest indicates that the company has succeeded in attracting customer attention and interest better than in the previous period (Nuraini & Adialita, 2024). Fourth, customers are more satisfied with products or services. Customer satisfaction with a company's products or services is influenced by product quality, service quality, price, and emotional factors, as well as the extent to which the purchased products or services meet their needs, and an assessment of whether the time and money spent on the purchase and consumption are worthwhile. This increase in satisfaction indicates that the company has succeeded in improving the quality and value perceived by customers (Faeq, 2022; Ramadhaniati et al., 2020).

Hypotheses

Professional knowledge possessed by business owners or managers is of utmost importance. The more professional knowledge they possess, the greater the likelihood of them enhancing the competitiveness of the business in a fiercely competitive market. This knowledge not only helps business actors make better decisions but also in creating innovations to improve service quality (Shin & Park, 2024). In addition to professional knowledge, the more work or leadership experience possessed by business actors or company managers, the more aligned it is with their experience in undergoing company operational management. Company operations are activities of transforming inputs into outputs by channeling the right resources in the process. Wandiga & Ngila (2024) state that the competence to manage company operations well can strengthen the company's competitiveness in the market, because in that way effectiveness and efficiency can be

achieved to ensure the company's long-term sustainability.

Within the company, resources are not only passive or inanimate objects, but also humans in whom relationships are woven between one human resource and another. The ability of company leaders who have competence in building good relationships not only with fellow workers within the company, but also with customers can increase the company's competitiveness. This is in line with what is explained by Tegor et al (2023) who state that interpersonal skills and relationship-building abilities make a positive and significant contribution to increasing organizational competitiveness. Leaders who possess this competence can motivate teams and create a positive work culture, which in turn improves overall performance. Increasing this competence among employees can be an effective strategy for increasing the competitiveness of organizations in a competitive market.

Knowledge usually stems from direct experience experienced by business owners or the managerial level. Direct experience refers to the interaction and involvement of individuals in real situations as well as direct experience with customers, suppliers, and other parties in the business environment. Experience-based competence is very important for leaders in developing innovative strategies and creating added value for customers. By understanding customer needs in depth, leaders can increase company competitiveness and ensure sustainability in a dynamic business environment (Hoang et al., 2024).

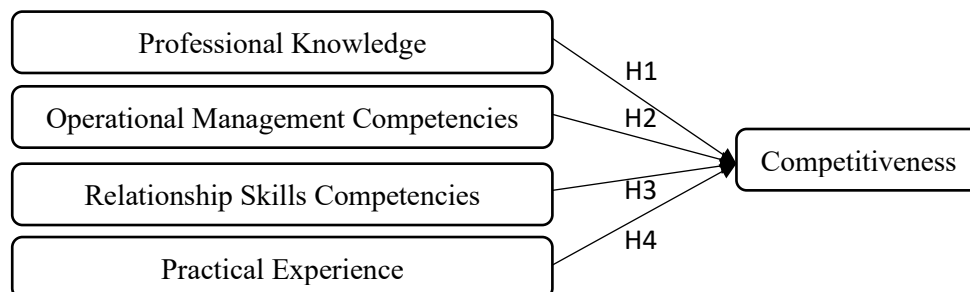
Thus, it can be concluded for the time being that the more business owners or managers at the same level in the service industry, especially in salons, who have good professional knowledge, the more practical experience they have, the higher the operational management competencies and relationship skills competencies, the more it can increase the company's competitiveness. Therefore, this research proposes the following preliminary hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's professional knowledge on the company's competitiveness.

H2: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's operational management competencies on the company's competitiveness.

H3: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's relationship skills competencies on the company's competitiveness.

H4: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's practical experience on the company's competitiveness.



Source: Author's Work

Research Methodology

The subjects of this research are the owners and managers of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta. The sample size used in this study is 110 respondents. This selection is based on their role as key decision-makers in business operations and business development strategies. The research respondents include beauty salon owners from various business scales, ranging from micro to medium-sized salons, with diverse experiences and backgrounds in the beauty industry. In this study, the questionnaire method was used as the primary tool for data collection. The simple random sampling technique was applied in the selection of respondents, considering the large number of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta, and not all have well-documented data. To facilitate the data collection process, this research also used Google Forms as a medium for online questionnaire distribution, making it more efficient to reach respondents in various areas of Jakarta.

In this research, data was collected through a survey method, namely questionnaires distributed to owners or managers of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta. The data collection method used was a questionnaire via Google Forms. A questionnaire is a process or approach used to gather information or responses from respondents using a questionnaire form (Setiawan & Saputro, 2025). Data in this study will be collected through questionnaires given to respondents using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (Anggrenita & Sander, 2022).

To process the questionnaire results, this study employs SmartPLS 4 as an analysis tool. SmartPLS 4 was selected because this application allows researchers to use the bootstrapping technique, thereby eliminating the requirement for a minimum sample size. This enables research with limited sample sizes to still be processed (Hair et al., 2024). The PLS analysis process consists of three stages: outer model assessment, inner model assessment, and hypothesis testing. The outer model connects latent variables with their indicators, whether reflective (indicators reflect the variable) or formative (indicators influence the variable). PLS is a flexible and effective method for analyzing complex data with numerous relationships between variables. In this process, researchers conduct measurements to ensure the validity and reliability of these indicators. Meanwhile, the inner model analyzes the relationships between the latent variables themselves. This model illustrates the structure of relationships built upon existing theory, providing insights into the interactions between variables in the research.

The measurement model illustrates the relationships between latent variables (constructs) and their indicators. This study employs inferential statistical data analysis using SmartPLS software. The initial step involves assessing the outer model, which identifies the relationships between latent variables and their indicators. In this research, SmartPLS 4 is utilized to analyze the outer model by calculating validity and reliability values using the Outer Loading feature. Subsequently, construct reliability is evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. To measure construct validity, the researcher employs Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as discriminant validity with cross-loading analysis (Hair et al., 2024). For the inner model, the indicators used to evaluate the extent to which the dependent variable is influenced by the independent variable are derived from the R-Square evaluation criteria, divided into three categories: a value >0.75 is considered strong, a value >0.50 is considered moderate, and a value >0.25 is considered weak. Hypothesis testing is conducted by examining the t-statistic and probability values. At a significance level of 5%, the critical t-statistic value is 1.96. If the t-statistic exceeds 1.96, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Similarly, if the p-value is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is also accepted.

Results and Discussions

Respondent's Profile

This research involved owners and managers of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta as respondents. A total of 110 owners or managers of beauty salons in Jakarta participated as respondents in this study. The data obtained showed that 90.2% of the respondents were female, while 9.8% were male. The dominance of women in this data strongly reflects the reality of the beauty salon industry in Jakarta, where women play a significant role as both consumers and business actors. The active involvement of women in beauty salon SMEs indicates a social shift where women are not only users of beauty services but also key players in business development in this sector. This reinforces the finding that women's contribution to SMEs is significant for the national economy and the improvement of public welfare.

The research results show the age distribution of respondents consisting of several groups. The 26–35 year age group dominates with 31.5%, followed by the 36–45 year age group with 30.8%, the group above 46 years with 21%, and the 19–25 year age group with 16.8%. This data reflects that beauty salon SME actors are dominated by individuals in their productive age, both those in the early stages of their careers and those who are well-established in terms of experience. The presence of young generations (19–25 years) in a significant percentage indicates a high entrepreneurial spirit and interest of young people in the beauty sector. On the other hand, the participation of ages above 46 years shows the continuity between experience and business sustainability. Overall, this relatively even age distribution shows that beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta are driven by various generations, with a combination of young energy, innovation, and mature experience. This creates great opportunities for intergenerational collaboration in the development and improvement of business competitiveness in the beauty sector.

A study of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta reveals that the majority of respondents (67.1%) are high school/vocational school graduates, indicating the importance of secondary education, especially vocational training, in preparing individuals for entrepreneurship in the service sector. About 27.3% have a bachelor's degree, and 5.6% have a diploma. The absence of postgraduate degree holders suggests that while formal higher education isn't prevalent, individuals are still capable of running businesses competently. The dominance of high school/vocational graduates highlights the relevance of technical skills in this sector. However, the low proportion of higher education graduates also points to a need for further training and competency development through workshops and certifications. While formal education isn't the sole indicator of success, it can enhance strategic planning, financial management, and adaptability. The findings underscore the importance of combining practical experience with intellectual capacity to improve the competitiveness of beauty salon SMEs.

In regards of the length of time beauty salons have been in business, the majority of respondents in Jakarta have considerable experience managing their businesses. 38.5% have run their salons for over 7 years, 35% for 4-6 years, and 26.6% for 1-3 years. This data indicates that most beauty salon SMEs are in a mature phase, with over four years of experience. The presence of businesses operating for over seven years reflects resilience and consistency in a competitive industry. The high proportion of businesses with over four years of experience suggests established strategies and customer bases. The 26.6% operating for 1-3 years shows the sector is open to new entrepreneurs, potentially bringing innovation. The distribution reflects a combination of experienced and new businesses, supporting sustainable growth. While, data on the annual turnover of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta shows that 85.3% have a turnover of less than Rp300,000,000 per year. Only 14.7% record an annual turnover of over Rp300,000,000 up to Rp2,500,000,000, placing them in the small business category according to Law Number 20 of 2008 concerning SMEs.

Results

Table 1. Validity Test Results

Variable	AVE Score	E value limit	RESULT
Professional Knowledge (X1)	0.728	0.5	Valid
Operational Management Competencies (X2)	0.613	0.5	Valid
Relationship Skills Competencies (X3)	0.692	0.5	Valid
Practical Experiences (X4)	0.732	0.5	Valid
Competitiveness (Y1)	0.658	0.5	Valid

The AVE values for each variable are: Professional Knowledge (0.728), Operational Management Competencies (0.613), Relationship Skills Competencies (0.692), Practical Experiences (0.732), and Competitiveness (0.658). All five variables have values ≥ 0.50 , meaning they are categorized as valid. Operational Management Competencies has the lowest AVE (0.613), but remains valid. All constructs adequately explain their latent variables, with no serious issues in convergent validity. The AVE test results provide a strong basis for the measurement model meeting statistical requirements for further testing in the inner model and hypothesis testing, strengthening the reliability of the research results and interpretation.

Reliability Test Results

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variabel	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	Cronbach's alpha
Professional Knowledge (X1)	0.914	0.877
Operational Management Competencies (X2)	0.863	0.794
Relationship Skills Competencies (X3)	0.871	0.780
Practical Experiences (X4)	0.891	0.828
Competitiveness (Y1)	0.885	0.829

Based on the Composite Reliability Table 2, all variables in this study show satisfactory values above the minimum threshold of 0.70. The Composite Reliability values for the constructs/variables are: Professional Knowledge (0.914), Operational Management Competencies (0.863), Relationship Skills Competencies (0.871), Practical Experiences (0.891), and Competitiveness (0.885). All Composite Reliability values are ≥ 0.70 , indicating good reliability for all variables. Operational Management Competencies has the lowest value (0.863), but remains reliable. All Composite Reliability values indicate that the instruments in this study are reliable for measuring the constructs used. Overall, these results provide confidence that each construct in the model has excellent internal consistency, strengthening the validity of the instrument and providing a strong basis for continuing to the structural model (inner model) analysis and inferential hypothesis testing. Therefore, it can be concluded that all constructs in this study are proven reliable and can be trusted as representations of the variables studied.

Table 3. Inner Model Test Result

Dependent Variable	R-Square	R-Square adjusted
Competitiveness	0.308	0.283

Based on the table, the R² value of 0.283 indicates that 28.3% of the variation in company performance and competitiveness can be explained by the independent variables: professional knowledge, operational management competencies, relationship skills competencies, and practical experiences. The R-Square values are categorized as weak because they are less than 0.50. This means that although the studied variables contribute to the competitiveness of beauty salon SMEs, their contribution is limited. Approximately 71.7% to 72.4% of the variability in company performance and competitiveness is influenced by other factors not included in this model. These factors could include price, business location, customer loyalty, digital promotion, service innovation, beauty industry trends, and macroeconomic conditions not included in this study. Although this model provides a useful initial overview, the results indicate the need for further research model development that considers other external variables to more comprehensively explain the factors influencing the competitiveness of beauty salon SMEs.

Hypotheses Results

Table 4

Jalur	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Ket.
Professional Knowledge → Competitiveness	0.181	0.181	0.086	2.094	0.036	Significant
Operational Management Competencies → Competitiveness	0.172	0.181	0.115	1.497	0.134	Insignificant
Relationship Skills Competencies → Competitiveness	0.215	0.217	0.102	2.118	0.034	Significant
Practical Experiences → Competitiveness	0.300	0.300	0.086	3.494	0.000	Significant

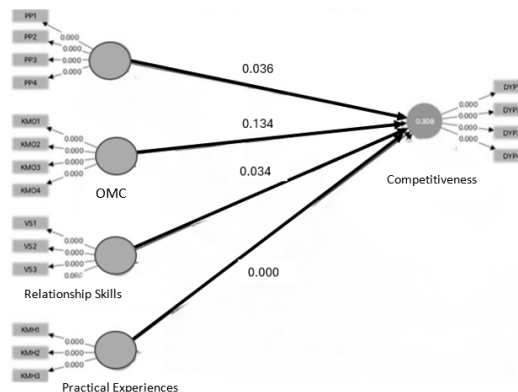


Fig 2. Boothstrapping (Hypotheses Tests)

H1: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider’s professional knowledge on the company’s competitiveness.

The hypothesis tests the influence of professional knowledge on the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta compared to their competitors. The test results show that the path (H1) of professional knowledge on the competitiveness and performance of the company compared to competitors produces an original sample (O) value of 0.181, with a t-statistic of 2.094 and a p-value of 0.036. The t-statistic value > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 indicate that the influence is statistically significant. Empirically, there is a significant relationship between professional knowledge and salon competitiveness when compared to competitors. This aligns with research by Cong et al (2021) and Shin & Park (2024), where professional knowledge is a key element in building competitive advantage, especially in service industries such as beauty salons. However, professional knowledge must be demonstrated through real action in service delivery to materialize in a tangible form. Moreover, knowledge can be shown through communication with customers and operational innovation to increase customer satisfaction and demonstrate business added value. Professional knowledge is crucial for enhancing a salon's competitive advantages because Deep knowledge of techniques, products, and trends allows stylists to provide higher-quality services that meet and exceed client expectations. This leads to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, professional knowledge enables salons to offer specialized services that differentiate them from competitors. The beauty industry is dynamic, therefore continuous learning and staying updated on the latest trends, products, and techniques ensures the salon remains relevant and attractive to clients.

H2: There is no significant influence of the service provider's operational management competencies on the company's competitiveness.

The hypothesis in this study examines the influence of operational management competence on the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs in Jakarta. Based on the test results in Table 4, it was found that the path of operational management competence towards competitiveness and company performance compared to competitors yielded an original sample (O) value of 0.172, a t-statistic of 1.497, and a p-value of 0.134. The t-statistic value is <1.96 and the p-value is >0.05, so the result is there is no significant influence of the service

provider's operational management competencies on company's competitiveness. This indicates that empirically, operational management competence is not proven to have a significant effect on the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs. This finding suggests that managerial ability in regulating and evaluating operational processes, although theoretically important, does not necessarily result in improved performance that can be directly felt by customers or create a competitive advantage over competitors.

In the theory that has been outlined, operational management should play an important role in supporting company competitiveness. According to Wandiga & Ngila, (2024), an effective operational management strategy can increase efficiency and create a sustainable competitive advantage in the service sector. However, Cotelnic (2023) argues that if operational management relies too much on manual processes and is not accompanied by the adoption of technology and innovation, its effectiveness will be limited. The results of this study are in line with these findings, which show that operational management that is not developed adaptively has not made a real contribution to the competitiveness of beauty salons. In addition, in the context of salon SMEs, business actors generally hold many roles, so operational functions are often carried out intuitively without a structured formal system. This reduces management's effectiveness in supporting competitiveness as expected. Cong et al. (2021) also mentioned that SME owners are often trapped in short-term operational routines, thus ignoring longer-term strategies that are more important in building a competitive advantage. Thus, hypothesis 2 is rejected, because operational management competence does not show a significant influence on the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs. These results provide important input that although operational management is an important component in the theory of competitiveness, its success in practice requires support from other aspects such as the use of technology, service innovation, and long-term strategic planning.

H3: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's relationship skills competencies on the company's competitiveness.

Based on the data presented in Table 4, the hypothesis stating that relationship skills competencies is presumed to have a significant influence on company competitiveness and performance shows an original sample (O) value of 0.215, with a T-statistic of 2.118, and a P-value of 0.034. This path shows a statistically significant influence, because the T-statistic value is >1.96 and the P-value is <0.05 . These results prove that competence in building relationships, both internal relationships with employees and external relationships with suppliers, business partners, and customers, contributes significantly to increasing the competitiveness of beauty salon SMEs. Close and harmonious relationships within the organization, as well as trust built with external parties, create a conducive work environment and strengthen customer loyalty and business continuity.

This explanation is in line with the theories put forward by Tegor et al. (2023) and Sembiring et al. (2023), where the ability to build relationships is one of the leadership competencies that has a direct impact on the competitiveness of the service sector. Cong et al. (2021) also stated that leaders who are able to foster long-term relationships with strategic partners and maintain effective communication with customers will be better able to create sustainable service differentiation. Furthermore, building relationships is not just about formal interactions, but also about creating trust, mutual respect, and long-term cooperation. In the context of beauty salon SMEs operating in a highly competitive market, strong relationships can be a key differentiator that encourages customers to remain loyal and even recommend services

to others, as reflected in the significant results on the customer perception path. Thus, hypothesis 3 is fully accepted, because relationship skills competencies is proven to significantly influence the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs. This result confirms that aspects of relationships and communication are important elements that business actors must possess to maintain a competitive position in the beauty services market.

H4: There is a positive and significant influence of the service provider's practical experience on the company's competitiveness.

From Table 4, the original sample (O) value is 0.300, the T-statistic is 3.494, and the P-value is 0.000. This path shows a statistically significant influence, because the T-statistic value is greater than 1.96 and the P-value is far below the 0.05 limit. These results empirically prove that the practical experience possessed by beauty salon SME business actors makes a significant contribution to increasing competitiveness and business performance. Practical experience includes the direct involvement of business actors in carrying out operational activities, making decisions, and solving problems directly based on field realities.

This finding is in line with research by Cong et al. (2021) and Karuga et al. (2021), where practical experience is an important element of entrepreneurial learning that contributes greatly to improving managerial competence and more accurate decision-making. Experience gained practically in the field helps SME actors understand market dynamics, customer behaviour, and how to deal with operational challenges effectively. Thus, experience becomes a strong foundation in building adaptive and responsive business strategies to market changes. Furthermore, Sembiring et al. (2023) emphasize that direct experience creates tactical advantages that are difficult for competitors to imitate because they are formed from a unique learning process that is specific to certain business situations. Customers can also feel this advantage through services that are more personal, solution-oriented, and consistent, as reflected in the significant value on the customer perception path. Thus, hypothesis 4 is fully accepted, because practical experience is proven to have a significant effect on the competitiveness and performance of beauty salon SMEs. These results indicate that the accumulation of practical experience is an important asset that must continue to be developed by business actors in improving success and competitiveness.

Conclusions

Based on the results of testing four hypotheses in the study "Analysis of the Influence of Professional Knowledge, Operational Management Competencies, Relationship Skills Competencies, and Practical Experience on the Competitiveness of Beauty Salon SMEs in Jakarta," the following conclusions can be drawn:

Professional knowledge of competitiveness and company performance compared to competitors is proven to be significant, indicating that knowledge of the service providers about all the products and the way they treat the customers in salons may build strong trust and confidence in customer's mind. So, customers will be more comfortable and build customer's loyalty. That shows professional knowledge has improved salon's competitive position in customer's mind. Operational management competencies do not play significant role to influence competitiveness, indicating that current salon's operational capabilities have not influenced efficiency and effectiveness enough to increase competitive advantage. To increase a salon's efficiency and productivity, streamlining workflows, optimizing scheduling, and managing resources (such as products, equipment, and staff time) are crucial. These actions can increase service capacity, reduce operational costs, and enable competitive pricing by minimizing waste and maximizing

output. Relationship skill competencies have been shown to have a significant impact on company competitiveness. These skills show that service providers are able to establish internal and external cooperation that become the main driver of competitive advantage. Practical experience is conformed significantly influence company's competitiveness. This research confirms that confirming that the practical experience of salon owners is the strongest factor in improving competitive position. Salon services are inherently hands-on. Practical experience allows providers to refine their techniques, develop muscle memory, and gain the dexterity needed to execute services with precision and efficiency. True mastery comes from repetition and application of the services. Therefore this practical experience influence significant positively to salon's competitiveness. Moreover, every client in salon is different. Practical experience exposes providers to a wide range of hair types, skin conditions, and client preferences. This fosters the ability to adapt techniques, troubleshoot unexpected issues, and tailor services to meet individual needs.

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