



## Service Quality and Expectations Toward Partner Loyalty: The Moderating Role of Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the effects of Service Quality, Customer Expectations, and Partner Satisfaction on Partner Loyalty and to examine the role of Partner Satisfaction as a moderating variable in the Master's Program in Management at Universitas Trisakti. This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS, based on 285 valid observations. The results indicate that Customer Expectations and Partner Satisfaction have positive and significant effects on Partner Loyalty. In contrast, Service Quality does not have a significant effect on Partner Loyalty. Partner Satisfaction was also not found to moderate either the relationship between Service Quality and Partner Loyalty or the relationship between Customer Expectations and Partner Loyalty. The novelty of this study lies in positioning external partners as the primary unit of evaluation in The Three Pillars of Higher Education cooperation, rather than students as higher education customers. The findings suggest that partner loyalty is shaped more strongly by actual satisfaction and the fulfillment of partner expectations than by direct perceptions of service quality. Practically, this study provides a basis for academic programs to strengthen partner expectation mapping, conduct periodic satisfaction evaluations, and document the benefits generated from collaborative activities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Service Quality, Customer Expectations, Partner Satisfaction, Partner Loyalty, Moderation, the Three Pillars of Higher Education

### INTRODUCTION

In the global era, higher education institutions no longer function merely as providers of education. They also serve as strategic institutions that develop knowledge networks, foster innovation, and promote social sustainability through stakeholder engagement. Partnerships with the business sector, industry, government, communities, professional organizations, and society at large are increasingly important because The Three Pillars of Higher Education requires institutions to create shared value rather than simply perform academic activities as administrative obligations. Filho et al. (2025) show that stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in supporting sustainable development in higher education, while Oliveira et al. (2024) emphasize that co-creation strengthens innovation and generates mutual value for institutions and their partners.

In an increasingly competitive and globally connected higher education environment, universities are expected to build partnerships that respond to the needs of external stakeholders. Educational, research, and community service activities should generate tangible value for partners and society, rather than function only as administrative requirements. This issue is important because the quality of academic services has been shown to influence satisfaction, while satisfaction plays a key role in strengthening loyalty toward higher education institutions (Supriyanto et al., 2024)

The main issue in university partnerships is that partner loyalty does not automatically emerge simply because an institution provides partnership services. Loyalty is more likely to develop when partners perceive that their expectations have been fulfilled, experience positive interactions, and feel satisfied with the benefits generated through the partnership. The relationship among expectations, satisfaction, and loyalty can be explained through the expectancy-disconfirmation approach, in which satisfaction arises

when service experiences meet or exceed initial expectations (Schiebler et al., 2026). In the context of higher education, Nguyen et al. (2024) show that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty may be influenced by moderating variables. This indicates that loyalty is shaped not only by satisfaction directly but also by institutional conditions that may strengthen this relationship.

Partnerships represent a key element in the implementation of The Three Pillars of Higher Education. Collaborative relationships between universities and external partners are essential for supporting education, research, and community service, while also strengthening institutional relevance to the needs of business, industry, society, and other stakeholders (Velankar et al., 2025). In the context of the Master's Program in Management at Universitas Trisakti, partnership sustainability serves as an important indicator of institutional relationship quality, academic reputation, and the program's ability to deliver tangible benefits to external parties.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on external partners as the primary unit of evaluation, rather than on students as higher education customers, which has been the dominant focus of many previous studies. Oliveira et al. (2024) indicate that satisfaction is one of the key factors shaping student loyalty in higher education. However, research on partner loyalty in Three Pillars of Higher Education collaborations remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effects of Service Quality, Customer Expectations, and Partner Satisfaction on Partner Loyalty and to examine the role of Partner Satisfaction as a moderating variable in the Master's Program in Management at Universitas Trisakti.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Partner Loyalty

Partner loyalty is a long-term commitment by external parties to an institution, reflected in their willingness to continue the



partnership, provide recommendations, and remain collaborative, even when other partnership alternatives exist (Liu et al., 2025). Saini & Singh (2020) explain that loyalty consists of two main dimensions: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, whereby attitudinal loyalty can foster behavioral loyalty. Loyalty can be strengthened through effective communication, transparency in program implementation, and clarity regarding the benefits partners receive (Arevin et al., 2024).

Damanik et al. (2024) assert that customer loyalty results from a long-term interplay between satisfaction, trust, and perceptions of service quality. Partners who have consistent experiences of collaboration find it easier to build trust in the institution and exhibit loyal behavior (Susan et al., 2023). In the context of higher education, this concept is also relevant because loyalty is not only evident through concrete actions such as continuing the collaboration, reusing services, or recommending the institution, but is also reflected in trust, emotional attachment, positive evaluations, and confidence in the institution's reputation (Almanwari et al., 2024).

### Service Quality

Service quality refers to an institution's ability to provide services that meet or exceed its customers' expectations (Wirtz, 2022). In the context of academic collaboration, service quality encompasses the reliability of activity implementation, responsiveness, procedural certainty, empathy, communication, and tangible evidence of the service that supports collaboration. Parasuraman et al. (1988) SERVQUAL model serves as an important conceptual foundation because it explains service quality through the dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility.

High-quality service not only meets partners' needs but also acts as a strategic tool for creating a competitive advantage. Recent research by Nainggolan et al. (2022) showed that improving service quality can strengthen customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty in the long term. Service quality is also dynamic because it depends heavily on individuals' perceptions of their experience. Priambodo & Nainggolan (2024) emphasized that customers assess quality based on the alignment between their initial expectations and the actual performance they experience. If the service provided exceeds expectations, customers will feel satisfied and are more likely to exhibit loyal behavior. Hapsara et al. (2023) explain that service organizations capable of consistently maintaining high quality will build a positive image and gain sustained support from their partners.

### Customer Expectations

Partner expectations serve as a measuring stick for assessing the quality of services provided. These standards are influenced by previous encounters, communication from service providers, organizational needs, institutional reputation, and other sources (Alan et al., 2024). Meeting partner expectations is critical because it directly impacts how they evaluate our collaboration - whether we have delivered on our promises through effective processes and achieved satisfactory results (Nurfajriani, 2020). A successful delivery that meets or exceeds their expectations often leads to feelings of contentment and loyalty towards us. On the flip side, failing to meet these benchmarks can result in negative perceptions of our institution.

In order to foster meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders such as customers or clients, active involvement plays a vital role. It not only strengthens the relevance of programs but also empowers communities while creating shared value between universities and partners (Filho et al. 2025); Oliveira et al. (2024). According to Schultes et al. (2025) service learning entails ongoing teamwork with community partners and inclusive evaluation methods, while Arifin et al. (2025) highlight the importance of conducting needs assessments and establishing well-defined modes of collaboration between universities and partner organizations, accompanied by consistent monitoring, assessment, and measurement of long-term effects.

### Partner Satisfaction

Partner satisfaction is a crucial measure of the success and effectiveness of any partnership. It reflects how well initial expectations align with actual experiences throughout the collaboration (Nainggolan et al., 2022). When partners feel that their goals have been achieved, that the services provided have been effective, and that their needs are being met by the institution involved in the partnership, then true satisfaction arises (Hu et al., 2025). In this study, we measured partner satisfaction using various factors such as service suitability, achievement of collaboration goals, willingness to recommend to others, and desire for continued collaboration.

Partner satisfaction plays an important role in fostering loyalty because satisfied partners are more likely to develop trust, emotional attachment, commitment to maintaining the relationship, and a willingness to provide positive recommendations. This relationship has also been supported in the higher education context. Oliveira et al. (2024) showed that satisfaction is a key determinant of loyalty in higher education institutions. In a similar context, Supriyanto et al. (2024) found that student satisfaction contributes to student loyalty in legally incorporated universities in Indonesia.

In addition to its direct contribution to loyalty, satisfaction may also influence the strength of the relationship between other determinants and loyalty. Memon et al. (2020) and Priambodo & Nainggolan (2024) found that satisfaction strengthens the positive effect of service quality on customer loyalty. When partners experience a high level of satisfaction, they are more likely to tolerate minor service limitations and remain committed to continuing the partnership. Studies in education and service settings also indicate that satisfaction can strengthen the relationship between expectation fulfillment and loyalty intention [Nurfajriani (2020); Schultes et al. (2025)]. Thus, the higher the level of satisfaction perceived by partners, the stronger the effect of fulfilled expectations on loyalty. Based on this argument, partner satisfaction is examined in this study not only as a variable that directly influences loyalty but also as a moderating variable in the relationship between expectation fulfillment and loyalty.

### HYPOTHESIS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

H1: Service quality affects partner loyalty.

H2: Customer Expectations Influence Partner Loyalty.

H3: Partner satisfaction influences partner loyalty.

H4: Partner Satisfaction moderates the relationship between Service Quality and Partner Loyalty.

H5: Partner Satisfaction moderates the relationship between Customer Expectations and Partner Loyalty making

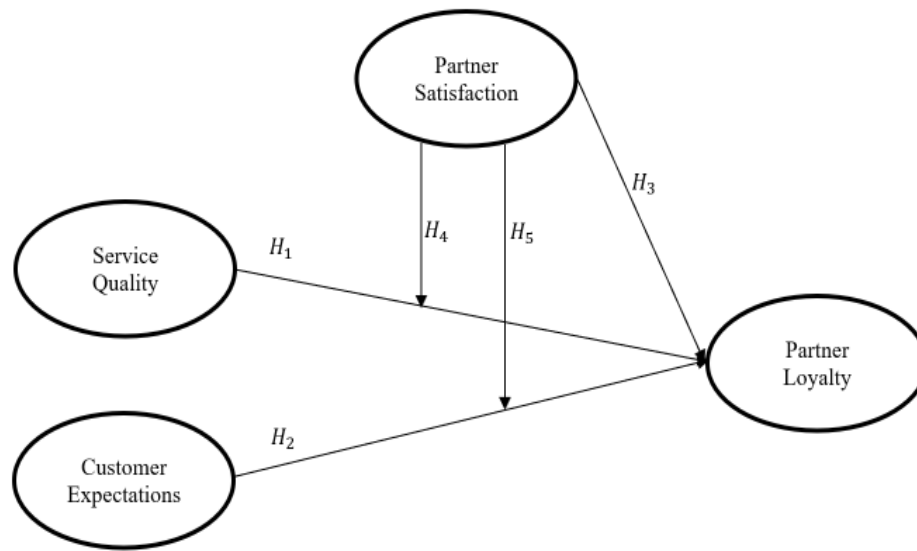


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Populasi dan Sample

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design, deemed suitable for capturing partners' perceptions at a single point in time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2025). The unit of analysis consisted of partners who had established collaborative relationships with the Master's Program in Management at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trisakti. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire, resulting in 285 valid responses following data screening, quality assessment, and indicator refinement.

### Data Analysis Technique

A self-administered questionnaire was used, allowing respondents to complete it independently and minimizing researcher-induced perceptual bias (Jr et al., 2023). Prior to testing the final model, the dataset underwent quality assessment and indicator refinement. All questionnaire items utilized a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling precise measurement of variations in respondents' attitudes and perceptions (Taherdoost, 2019).

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, or PLS-SEM, with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was deemed appropriate for this study because the

proposed model included latent constructs, reflective indicators, and interaction terms designed to examine moderating effects. Model assessment was conducted in two stages: measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation. Hypothesis testing was performed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples at a 5% significance level.

**The structural model in this study is formulated as follows:**

$$LP = \beta_1 KP + \beta_2 HP + \beta_3 KM + \beta_4 (KM \times KP) + \beta_5 (KM \times HP) + e$$

LP is Partner Loyalty, KP is Service Quality, HP is Customer Expectations, KM is Partner Satisfaction,  $KM \times KP$  is the interaction effect between Partner Satisfaction and Service Quality, and  $KM \times HP$  is the interaction effect between Partner Satisfaction and Customer Expectations.

### Validity and Reliability Measurement Testing

Validity and reliability assessments were conducted to ensure that the indicators adequately represented their respective constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), whereas construct reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR). Indicators with relatively lower loading values were retained when the overall construct met the recommended thresholds, namely an AVE above 0.50 and a CR above 0.70.

Table 1. Results of Validity and Reliability Tests

| Items                        | Estimated Loading Factor | AVE   | CR    |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| <b>Service Quality</b>       |                          | 0.537 | 0.852 |
| AS1                          | 0.676                    |       |       |
| AS2                          | 0.796                    |       |       |
| RB1                          | 0.742                    |       |       |
| RB2                          | 0.702                    |       |       |
| TB1                          | 0.741                    |       |       |
| <b>Customer Expectations</b> |                          | 0.514 | 0.840 |
| HKL2                         | 0.630                    |       |       |

|                      |       |       |       |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| HKS1                 | 0.777 |       |       |
| HKS2                 | 0.789 |       |       |
| KP1                  | 0.662 |       |       |
| KP2                  | 0.714 |       |       |
| Partner Satisfaction |       | 0.590 | 0.896 |
| KM1                  | 0.692 |       |       |
| KM2                  | 0.746 |       |       |
| KS1                  | 0.769 |       |       |
| KS2                  | 0.831 |       |       |
| MK1                  | 0.763 |       |       |
| MK2                  | 0.802 |       |       |
| Partner Loyalty      |       | 0.544 | 0.877 |
| RF1                  | 0.716 |       |       |
| RF2                  | 0.680 |       |       |
| RP1                  | 0.788 |       |       |
| RP2                  | 0.741 |       |       |
| RT1                  | 0.733 |       |       |
| RT2                  | 0.762 |       |       |

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of the PLS algorithm indicate that the Partner Loyalty construct achieved an R-square value of 0.505. This result suggests that Service Quality, Customer Expectations, Partner Satisfaction, and the two interaction terms collectively explain

50.5% of the variance in Partner Loyalty. The remaining 49.5% is attributable to other factors not included in the proposed research model. Among the tested relationships, Partner Satisfaction showed the strongest effect on Partner Loyalty, with a coefficient value of 0.350. This was followed by Customer Expectations, which had a coefficient value of 0.277 in predicting Partner Loyalty.

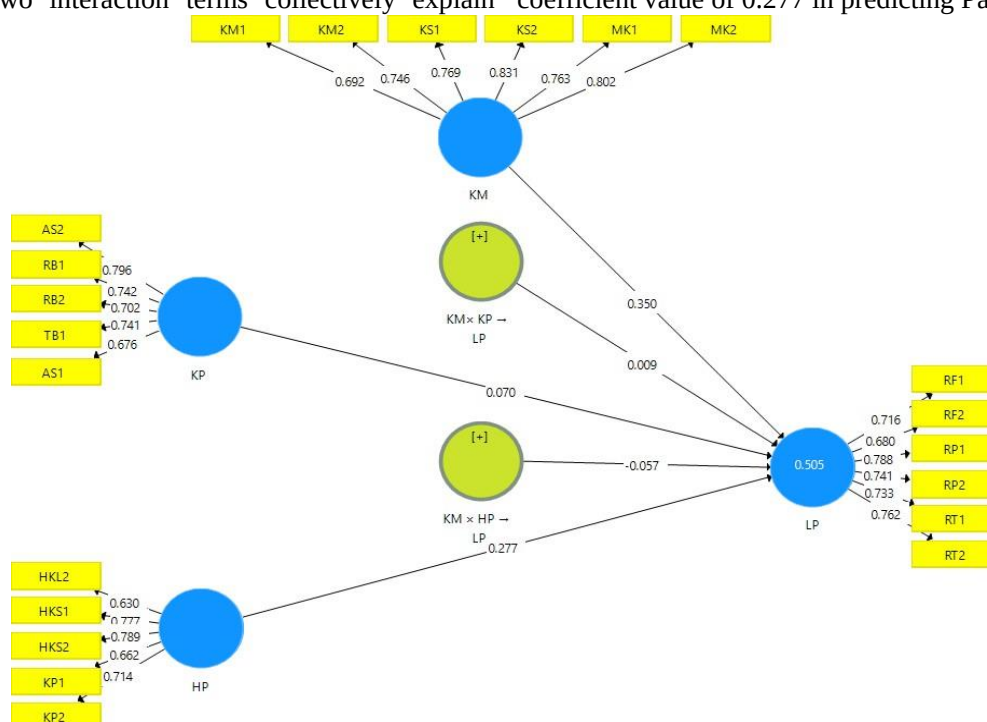


Figure 2. Results of the PLS Algorithm

The significance of the structural paths was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure. The results indicated that the path from Customer Expectations to Partner Loyalty yielded a t-statistic of 3.882, while the path from Partner Satisfaction to Partner Loyalty yielded a t-statistic of 5.607. These results suggest that both

relationships are statistically significant. In contrast, the effect of Service Quality on Partner Loyalty had a t-statistic of 1.229. The interaction effect of  $KM \times KP$  had a t-statistic of 0.155, whereas the interaction effect of  $KM \times HP$  had a t-statistic of 1.211. These three paths did not reach statistical significance at the 5% level.



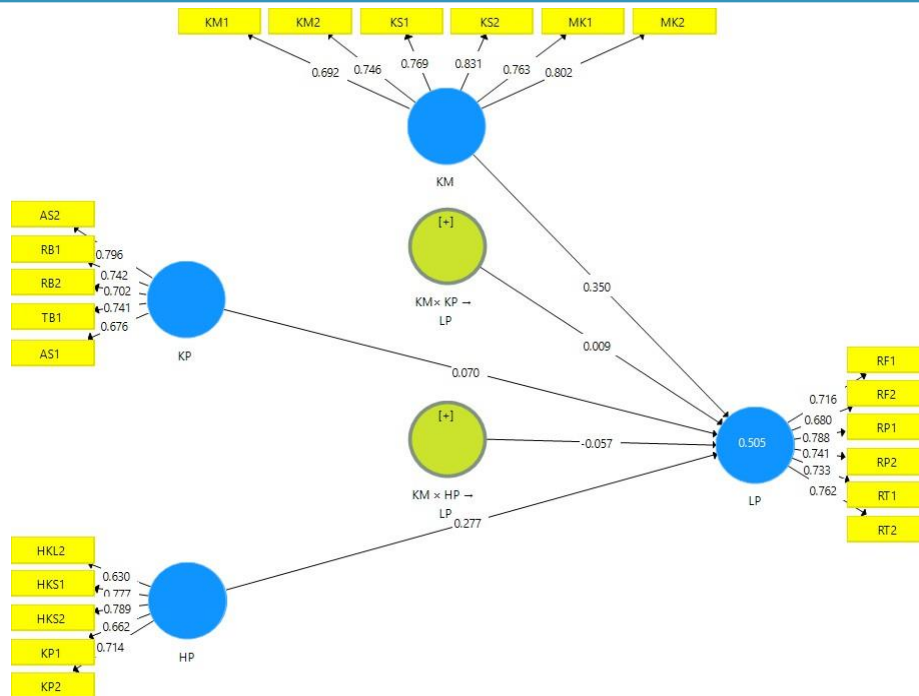


Figure 3. Bootstrapping Results

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results: Direct Effect

| Hypothesis | Path                                    | Estimate | t-value | P-Value | Result          |
|------------|-----------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| H1         | Service Quality → Partner Loyalty       | 0.070    | 1.229   | 0.219   | Not Significant |
| H2         | Customer Expectations → Partner Loyalty | 0.277    | 3.882   | 0.000   | Significant     |
| H3         | Partner Satisfaction → Partner Loyalty  | 0.350    | 5.607   | 0.000   | Significant     |

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results with Moderation

| Hypothesis | Independent Variable  | Moderator Variable   | Dependent Variable | Estimate | P-Value | t-value | Result          |
|------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| H4         | Service Quality       | Partner Satisfaction | Partner Loyalty    | 0.009    | 0.877   | 0.155   | Not Significant |
| H5         | Customer Expectations | Partner Satisfaction | Partner Loyalty    | -0.057   | 0.226   | 1.211   | Not Significant |

## Discussion

The results of the H1 test indicate that Service Quality has a positive but statistically insignificant effect on Partner Loyalty, as reflected by a coefficient of 0.070, a t-statistic of 1.229, and a p-value of 0.219. Since the t-statistic is below the threshold of 1.96 and the p-value exceeds 0.05, H1 is not supported. This finding suggests that partners' favorable perceptions of service quality are not sufficient to directly enhance their loyalty. From a practical perspective, partners may perceive service quality as a basic requirement that institutions are expected to provide. Therefore, favorable service quality alone does not necessarily translate into stronger loyalty. Partner loyalty is more likely to develop when the services provided are aligned with partners' expectations and generate a meaningful level of satisfaction.

The results of the H2 test indicate that Customer Expectations have a positive and significant effect on Partner

Loyalty, as evidenced by a coefficient of 0.277, a t-statistic of 3.882, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, H2 is supported. This finding suggests that the stronger the alignment between the services delivered and partners' expectations, the higher the level of partner loyalty toward the Master's Program in Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trisakti. The results further indicate that effective expectation management is essential for sustaining The Three Pillars of Higher Education-based partnerships. These findings emphasize the importance of identifying and clarifying partner expectations before collaboration begins, particularly regarding partnership objectives, communication mechanisms, implementation timelines, and expected outcomes. When partners perceive that their expectations are acknowledged and fulfilled, they are more likely to continue the partnership and recommend the program to others.



The results of the H3 test indicate that Partner Satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on Partner Loyalty, as reflected by a coefficient of 0.350, a t-statistic of 5.607, and a p-value of less than 0.001. Thus, H3 is supported. Among all predictors in the model, Partner Satisfaction exerts the strongest influence, as it has the highest path coefficient and f-square value compared with the other constructs. This finding suggests that partner loyalty is largely shaped by a positive collaboration experience, perceived partnership benefits, institutional trust, willingness to maintain the collaboration, and readiness to recommend the institution to other parties. From a managerial perspective, the Master's Program in Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trisakti, should position partner satisfaction as a key indicator for evaluating the success of its The Three Pillars of Higher Education-based collaborations.

The results of the H4 test indicate that the interaction between Partner Satisfaction and Service Quality has no significant effect on Partner Loyalty, as reflected by a coefficient of 0.009, a t-statistic of 0.155, and a p-value of 0.877. Thus, H4 is not supported. This finding suggests that Partner Satisfaction does not significantly strengthen or weaken the effect of Service Quality on Partner Loyalty. In other words, the influence of Service Quality on Partner Loyalty remains relatively stable across both high and low levels of Partner Satisfaction. These results indicate that Partner Satisfaction functions more strongly as a direct determinant of loyalty than as a moderating factor in the relationship between Service Quality and Partner Loyalty.

The results of the H5 test indicate that the interaction between Partner Satisfaction and Customer Expectations has no significant effect on Partner Loyalty, as reflected by a coefficient of -0.057, a t-statistic of 1.211, and a p-value of 0.226. Thus, H5 is not supported. This finding suggests that Partner Satisfaction does not significantly moderate the relationship between Customer Expectations and Partner Loyalty. Although Customer Expectations directly influence Partner Loyalty, and Partner Satisfaction also contributes directly to Partner Loyalty, their interaction does not produce a statistically significant effect. From a practical perspective, this result implies that expectations and satisfaction function as

distinct direct determinants of loyalty rather than as factors that reinforce each other through a moderating mechanism.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the measurement model meets the required validity and reliability criteria. Each construct achieved an AVE value above 0.50 and a composite reliability value above 0.70, indicating that the indicators adequately represent their respective latent variables. The structural model produced an R-square value of 0.505, showing that the proposed model explains 50.5% of the variance in Partner Loyalty.

The empirical findings reveal that Customer Expectations and Partner Satisfaction have positive and significant effects on Partner Loyalty. Among the predictors examined, Partner Satisfaction emerged as the most influential determinant of loyalty. In contrast, Service Quality showed a positive but statistically insignificant direct effect on Partner Loyalty. The results also indicate that Partner Satisfaction does not significantly moderate the effects of Service Quality and Customer Expectations on Partner Loyalty.

The findings offer several practical implications for the Master's Program in Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trisakti. The program should place greater emphasis on managing partner satisfaction and identifying partner expectations at the initial stage of collaboration. The institution should also strengthen its satisfaction evaluation system, document the benefits generated from each collaboration, report partnership achievements more systematically, collect partner testimonials, and conduct structured follow-up activities. These efforts are essential for supporting the long-term sustainability of The Three Pillars of Higher Education-based partnerships.

This study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design limits its ability to capture changes in partner loyalty over time. Second, the model does not include other relevant variables, such as trust, commitment, perceived value, institutional reputation, and relationship quality. Third, the insignificant moderation results should be interpreted with caution, as they may reflect the specific characteristics of the research context. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal design and include additional relational variables to improve the explanatory power of the model.

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