

# EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN HIGH CONTACT SERVICES: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL INCLUDING INTERPERSONAL SELF CONSCIOUSNESS AND RAPPORT

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how interpersonal self-consciousness moderates the relationship between employee emotional competence and the rapport that will lead to personal and organization loyalty in high contact services. Target industry to validate the proposed model is the beauty salon industry. The sample consists of 333 customers. Data was collected through structured questionnaires from the male and female customers of the beauty salons in the Pakistan. The study used SPSS to analyze the data. To explain the basic information, correlation and consistency of the data, correlation matrix, cross tabulations, descriptive and reliability analysis were used. To test and prove the hypotheses, several linear regression models were used. Employee Emotional Competence (EEC) has a direct and positive relation with personal loyalty and company loyalty. Moreover, during service encounter rapport strengthens the relation between emotionally competent employee and the customer. Emotionally competent employees should be able to recognize the level of interpersonal self-consciousness of the customers. The results suggest that in beauty salon industry, loyalty of customer to the service employee contributes to make the customer loyal to the company (salon). The study is novel in the context of a developing market to educate managers on the role of employee emotional competence in presence of interpersonal self-consciousness.

**Keywords:** Employee emotional competence (EEC), Interpersonal self-consciousness, Rapport, Loyalty, and Affect Infusion model (AIM).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has been plagued by terror attacks and sectarian violence for the past two decades. The current government came into power on the promise of 'change,' and it is

working hard to make the country a desirable tourist destination. COVID-19 had a significant impact on several economic sectors, including tourism, not only in Pakistan but globally. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the total contribution of travel and tourism to Pakistan's GDP decreased from 5.7 percent to 4.4 percent in 2020 (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021). The government announced "a strategy to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on Pakistan's tourism sector. As part of this strategy, the government plans to create a one-of-a-kind training program for tourism industry personnel, including the most vulnerable (PTDC, 2020). Pakistan has been ranked 83<sup>rd</sup> by moving up six places as per Travel and Tourism Development Index (Report, 2022). People have become more aware of various therapeutic experiences as a result of increased travel experiences, leading in an increase in spas and beauty salons. The global market for spas and beauty salons estimated at US\$138.9 billion in the year 2020, is projected to reach a revised size of US\$191.6 billion by 2027 (Research.com, 2021). Attracting new customers and keeping them pleased has become more difficult for the tourism industry since COVID-19.

In the service industry, the role of emotions in the consumption experience is gaining the attention of both the academics and practitioners. An employee who is capable of comprehending the feelings of the customers finally triggers a positive relationship with the customer (Zablah et al., 2016). An employee must fulfill the emotional needs of the customers to improve the service consumption experience. (Delcourt et al., 2016) highlighted the role of the capability of the employee to show emotionally competent behavior. Service organizations should focus on actual behaviors, i.e., employee emotional competence. These behaviors fulfill the demands of the customer and may or may not make him satisfied. (Eroglu, Machleit and Barr, 2005) investigated how the behavior of customers is influenced by the presence of others in a retail environment. Emotional content is abundant in high-contact services. As a result, in high-contact services, the customer's interpersonal self- consciousness can influence his service consumption experience

According to (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018) those employees who have the ability to maintain strong relationships with consumers can easily raise their perceived rapport. The relationship between the customer and the service personnel provides customer loyalty as an advantage to the service organization. Studies have revealed that relationships of customer with service provider are very powerful in generating customer loyalty to the service firm (Beatty et al., 1996; Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998). The theory of affect infusion (Forgas, 1995), positing that a person's affective state influences his or her judgment, supports this expectation: if an emotionally competent employee is successful in inducing a positive affective state, customers are less critical and, thus, more satisfied with the service experience .

In the age of multi-channel organizations, service differentiation has become increasingly difficult, and the significance of emotions in understanding the consumption experience in service industries is gaining traction. Because customers are diverse, an employee

who can embrace individual consumers' sentiments through a vicarious process is emotionally competent. Employees that are capable of maintaining positive customer interactions can quickly improve the perceived rapport of customers. Employees must satisfy consumers' emotional requirements to improve the consumption experience because emotions play such a large influence in the evaluation of a service.

Customer's feelings throughout a service contact can be influenced by the personality trait of the customer itself i.e., interpersonal self-consciousness. It has positive and negative inclination, however, (Buss, 1980) associated it with uncomfortable state. People are conscious when they are being observed by people having high status (Leary and Kowalski, 1990) or they are conscious about their appearance and behavior (Buss, 1980). Salesperson can be one of those people who can make people anxious and hence increases shoppers' public self-awareness. Many studies investigated how shoppers' behavior is influenced by the presence of other customers in retail environment (Eroglu, Machleit and Barr, 2005; He, Chen and Alden, 2012; Van Rompay et al., 2012). According to (Lovelock, 1991) beauty salons are categorized as highly customized services. It is critical for service providing personnel to control the customer's state of interpersonal self-consciousness in such a highly specialized and individualized services.

By examining the moderating function of interpersonal self-consciousness between employees emotional competence and rapport in the context of high contact services (beauty salons). The current study will fill in the gap. Additionally, we suggested that an emotionally competent employee can establish a rapport with the client that will ultimately result in a long-lasting relationship with the company or the employee; as a result, the mediating role of rapport between customers's perceived employee emotional competence and loyalty (both personal and corporate loyalty) will be investigated. A current study on the beauty salon sector is being done.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

### **A. Employee Emotional Competence and Rapport**

(Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993) defined rapport as the bonding between customers and the service employees that transforms into complex emotional or psychological interaction, generating a sense of responsiveness between both the entities. (Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal, 1990), propose when people came across each other and they spend good time due to chemistry between them, then they click each other and experience the feeling of rapport. Relations that have harmony, mutual understanding and good communication in them are in fact good quality relations. All these aspects build a rapport-based relationship. In service businesses, the role of the employee is much more than providing information to a customer, the employee has to build a rapport-based relationship with the customer to make him satisfied. Practitioners and scholars have highlighted the importance of developing rapport between the service provider and the customer (Giebelhausen et al., 2014) and an in-depth understanding of this construct is crucial for the success of the service organization. According to (Guttek et al., 1999)

service relationship and service interaction are different. Former is a series of repeated interaction of the customer with the service provider and the latter is actually a single interaction with the service provider and it involves no hopes for any future interaction. The interaction between service provider and the customer is salient in context of service businesses, because to evaluate the quality of service, the customer considers a lot of facets; one such is the interaction that happened between two parties (Pasuraman, Zeitaml and Berry, 1985). Service employees have always the chance to strengthen rapport perceptions because the customers are co-producers in service businesses. Thus, the perception of rapport has the positive impact on the customer's mind when he passes through the phase of judgment about the service.

Previous research proposes that interpersonal capabilities of emotionally intelligent people promote social success (Mcqueen and Mcqueen, 2004). Employee Emotional Competence (EEC) means the ability of a service employee to show emotionally competent behavior during service encounter by exhibiting the capability to identify, interpret and control the sentiments of the customer (Delcourt et al., 2016). EEC is comprehended as exhibition of job expertise on the basis of emotional intelligence (Giardini and Frese, 2008). Employees who own skills to establish connecting relationships with the customers can lift customer's perceived rapport easily (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018). Employee Emotional Competence uplifts the customers' rapport (perceived by customer), if personal trainers are able to utilize their communication and social skills (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018). Employees who are good at perceiving and understanding the emotions of customers are successful in creating a positive climate, because they take customer emotions as an important tool to manage the interaction in a smooth way (Mattila and Enz, 2002).

**H1: EEC significantly influences rapport in high-contact services**

## **B. Employee Emotional Competence and Customer Loyalty**

Intention of the customer to rebuy the products (goods or services) of the organization is termed as customer loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996). But for professional and personal services, the loyalty of the customer has two objects; it can be the service provider (company) or the service employee rendering the services (Bove and Johnson, 2006).

When an employee put some efforts to understand and solve the problem faced by the customer and make him satisfied, it helps to build customer loyalty. Employees such behaviors contribute to build a strong interpersonal bond, which is a strong predictor of loyalty in service businesses (Gremler and Brown, 1996). Human exchanges are just like give and take relationships in which both the parties try to reach a balance between what is being offered and what is being received. (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994) points out that when a party receives benefits, then it becomes obligatory on it to pay a cost for the benefits received. So, during the encounter of the customer with an emotionally competent employee, the customer may acknowledge an advantage and

feels obliged to the employee. To payoff this debt, the customer shows more loyalty to the service employee to maintain the equilibrium in relationship. Services cannot be treated separately from the service providers in most of the cases (Gronroos, 1978; Pasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985). This inextricable nature of the services gives researchers an opportunity to work more closely on the relationship between customers and service providers. In personalized services, once an emotionally competent employee addresses the requirements of the customer, it creates personal loyalty. When an employee leaves the firm or in case he is transferred, it becomes hard for the company to retain the customer because retention becomes endangered due to the risk posed by personal loyalty (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018). Studies have revealed a notable tie between the customer intention to follow the service provider and the level of personal loyalty (Beatty et al., 1996; Bove and Johnson, 2006). Personal loyalty has been actively negated by firms. Even though, the relation between service providers and customers is principally promoted, the phenomenon of well-built relation between service provider and customers is not (Bendapudi and Leone, 2002).

Two components contribute to the formation of the construct of loyalty named as behavioral and attitudinal component (Dick and Basu, 1994). The attitudinal component refers to the attitude of customer toward the service firm as compared to the competing firms providing same services. The behavioral component refers to the portion of the financing of customer to the service firm (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018). By the process of affect transfer, the customer's positive attitude towards service provider will directly contribute to the positive image formation of the firm in the customer's mind. A loyal customer is basically a highly satisfied customer (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Fornell, 1992) and in this way loyalty is created (Bitner, 1990; Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan, 1992; Dick and Basu, 1994; Fornell et al., 1996). If the customer is satisfied with the store, it makes him loyal and if the customer is satisfied with the services it will help in customer retention (Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998). An emotionally competent employee makes the customer satisfied by addressing his needs and solving the customer's query.

**H2:** In high-contact services, Customer-perceived EEC significantly influences (a) personal loyalty (b) loyalty towards company.

### **C. Influence of rapport in customer loyalty**

In marketing, rapport and trust are considered the chief constructs to explain customer loyalty (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018). Rapport reinforces the link between service employee and the customer (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). Previous research revealed, when an employee departs the firm, customers who had strong relation with the employee will also follow that employee and leave the firm (Reynolds and Beatty, 1999). Rapport may strengthen the relationship i.e., the level of commitment between customer and service employee (Liljander and Strandvik, 1995). Higher level of relationship commitment is linked with customer loyalty (Christopher et al., 1991). According to (Barnes, 1997) rapport between customer and employee will result into repeat patronage.

According to (Price and Arnould, 1999) in personalized services like hairstyling customer loyalty is the result of connecting or developing rapport with the hairstylist. Research done in past suggests that interpersonal relationship is a crucial module in services industry (Barnes, 1997; Guenzi and Pelloni, 2004) According to (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). Rapport is the main determinant of loyalty as it covers the social facet of the service quality. Employees, who are good at perceiving and understanding the emotions of customer, are successful in building rapport because they know how to customize the offerings according to the needs of the customer. Such type of perceived rapport results into higher level of commitment and satisfaction. (Lovelock, 1991) linked the higher level of commitment with customer loyalty. Emotionally competent employee uses the emotions of the customer as a useful tool to make the interaction smooth and pleasurable for the customer; by doing this they are successful in creating a positive climate during interaction (Mattila and Enz, 2002). Rapport reinforces the relationship between service provider and the customer (Azab and Clark, 2017). According to (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018), taking previous research under consideration it is believed that in personal training rapport and trust are the drivers of loyalty.

**H3:** In high-contact services, Rapport mediates the relationship between EEC and (a) personal loyalty (b) loyalty towards company.

According to (Bove and Johnson, 2006), if a customer is loyal to the specific employee, this loyalty may also be fruitful toward the company. By the process of affect transfer, the customer's positive attitude towards service provider will directly contribute to the positive image formation of the firm in the customer's mind. However, other researchers do not support this notion; they suggest that if a customer has strong relationship with employee, it does not necessarily mean that this relationship always generate loyalty to the firm (Bendapudi and Leone, 2002). When an employee leaves the workplace, the customer may choose to follow that employee in the new workplace to get the services. In this way personal loyalty can make customer retention endangered.

**H4:** In high-contact services, Personal Loyalty negatively influences loyalty toward the company.

#### **D. Influence of Interpersonal self-consciousness in rapport**

The public self-consciousness is all about the propensity towards oneself as recognized by others. The person's inclination to patronize the facets of one's personality that are apparent to the public. It is associated with impression management and noticeable displays (Cheek and Briggs, 1982).

In general people are bothered when they are observed by the people belonging to high status and rank (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Salespeople cannot be ignored in the social context of the store, so customer's self-consciousness is increased when they are being observed by them (Uhrich and Tombs, 2014). Being observed by salesperson can disturb the customer psychologically (Buss, 1980; Uhrich and Luck, 2012). (Dahl, Honea and Manchanda, 2005) show that a customer may feel guilty in some cases like when he

leaves the store without any purchase and he has any verbal interaction with the service personnel at the time of leaving the store. According to (Grace, 2007), service personnel are the reason of 66% of all the humiliating events in consumption settings, they cause customer embarrassment via nonverbal acts like making customer the central point of attention. Customers may feel themselves under pressure, like they have to pose that they have real intention to buy the products irrespective of the fact that they did not intend to buy (Uehara, 1995; Uhrich and Luck, 2012). This pressure is due to the assumption of the salesman because he hopes that the customer will purchase something (Dahl, Honea and Manchanda, 2005). Some customers want to interact with the service employee to inquire about the services while some want to hide in the crowd to feel confident. People go for impression management if they feel uncomfortable with the crowd or the service employee and in most of the cases, customers attempt to lie to manage their public image (Sengupta, Dahl and Gorn, 2002).

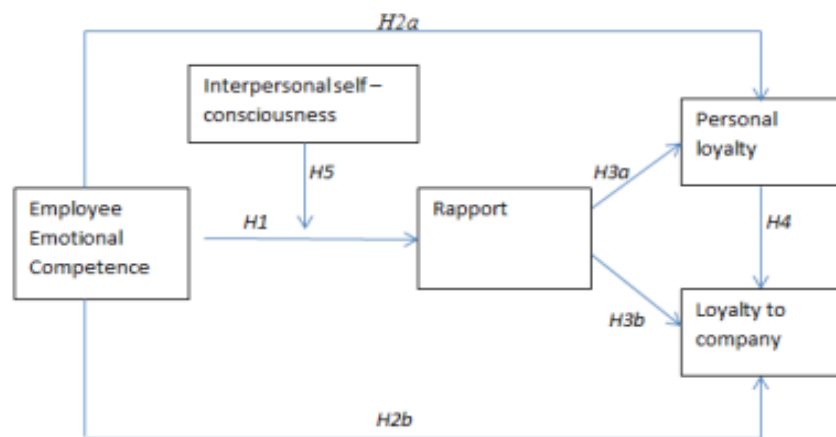
**H5:** Interpersonal self-consciousness moderates the relationship between EEC and Rapport

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework of this study explains the relationship among the variables and proposed hypotheses as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Theoretical frame work**



#### B. Sample and Data Collection

There are many beauty salons scattered all over Pakistan, yet this industry is largely unregulated and unorganized. The research was carried out using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. Both female and male customers, as units of analysis, attending the salons were provided electronic questionnaires; however, some

questionnaires were manually distributed. According to Item to response theory by (Nunnally, 1978) the sample size is 360 respondents. Response of 27 questionnaires was not included in the analysis because they were incomplete.

The questionnaire containing close-ended questions was distributed and respondents rated their opinion without any interference. Respondents were allowed to understand and fill out the questionnaire on their own. After the data was gathered, it was analyzed using statistical tools to conclude. To check the reliability of the scale, a pilot study was conducted and 40 questionnaires were distributed among customers of beauty salons. Both the genders, i.e., males and females, of different age groups were taken under consideration. The responses to the 40 questionnaires were entered into SPSS. The reliability of all the scales used in the research was found to be reliable.

### C. Measurement and Scales

Measurement instrument was adapted from (Delcourt et al., 2016) to measure EEC. It has three dimensions named Employee's Perception of Customer Emotion (EPCE), Employee Understanding of Customer Emotion (EUCE), and Employees' Regulation of Customer Emotion (ERCE). All variables in the study were operationalized with seven-point multi item Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Sample items of each dimension are given below in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample Items of each dimension**

Variable name	Sample Items	No. of Items	Scale	Reference
Employee Emotional Competence	My personal trainer (PT) is able to recognize how I feel	11	strongly disagree-strongly agree	(Delcourt et al., 2016)
Rapport	I like to interact with my PT	6	strongly disagree-strongly agree	(Gremier and Gwinner, 2000)
Personal Loyalty	I say positive things of my PT to others	4	strongly disagree-strongly agree	(Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996)
Loyalty toward company	I say positive things of my fitness center to others	4	strongly disagree-strongly agree	(Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996)
Interpersonal Self-consciousness	I'm concerned about my style of doing things	7	strongly disagree-strongly agree	(Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss, 1975)

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### A. Respondent Characteristics

The study consists of 333 customers of beauty salons. Out of 333 respondents, 105 were male and 228 were female. All the respondents are from different age groups as mentioned in Table 2. Customers were asked to state their frequency of visits to the beauty salon. 32 customers visit the beauty salon less than once a month. 123 customers visit the beauty salon once a month. 28 customers visit the beauty salon two to three

times a month. 19 customers visit the beauty salon once a week, and 26 customers visit the beauty salon twice a month.

**Table 2. Demographics**

Variables	Category	Total	
		Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	105	31.5
	Female	228	68.5
<b>Age</b>	20-24 years	212	63.7
	25-34 years	111	33.3
	35-44 years	10	3
	45-54 years	0	0
<b>Client</b>	Regular	144	43.2
	Irregular	189	56.8
<b>Frequency of visits</b>	Less than once a month	32	9.6
	Once a month	123	36.9
	Two to three times a month	28	8.4
	Once a week	19	5.7
	Twice a month	26	7.8
	Once in two months	25	7.5
	Once in three months	36	10.8
	Other	44	13.2

## B. Descriptive Statistics

The study has taken various characteristics of the customers of beauty salons under consideration. The descriptive statistics of the customers are listed in the Table 3. According to the mean and standard deviation of the variables included in the study, interpersonal self-consciousness has the highest mean value while rapport has lowest mean value. Rapport has highest value of standard deviation and employee emotional competence has lowest value of standard deviation.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics**

Variables		Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Gender	1.68	2.00
2	Age	1.39	1.00
3	Client	1.57	2.00
4	Frequency of visits	3.97	3.00
5	Employee Emotional Competence	3.9623	0.86150
6	Rapport	3.3948	1.04422
7	Loyalty to employee (Personal Loyalty)	4.4235	0.89197
8	Loyalty to company	4.5526	0.95210
9	Interpersonal Self-consciousness	4.6667	0.77972

### C. Correlational Matrix

The basic rules of correlation are being used to deduce the results. Table 4 exhibits the results of correlation matrix results are exhibiting that independent variable (Employee Emotional Competence) has positive and significant relationship with both independent variables i.e., Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company ( $r = 0.262^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.520^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It is inferred, in high contact services specifically beauty salon industry if an employee is emotionally competent he can make the customers loyal himself/herself and to the company (salon) as well. The independent variable (Employee Emotional Competence) has a positive and significant relationship with the mediator i.e., Rapport ( $r = 0.577^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The mediator (rapport) has positive and significant relationship with independent variables i.e., Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company ( $r = 0.253^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.419^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This explains that if an employee is emotionally competent, the customer will enjoy interacting with him. This will build rapport which will assist the employee to make the customer loyal to the service provider or the service institute. The dependent variable i.e., Personal loyalty also has a significant and positive relation with the second dependent variable i.e., Loyalty to company ( $r = 0.451^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It shows that if a customer is loyal to the service provider, he/she would also be loyal to the salon. The moderator (Interpersonal self- consciousness) has a significant and positive relationship with the mediator i.e., rapport ( $r = 0.506^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It explains that it will be easy for the service provider to build a rapport-based relationship with customers who have high public conscious awareness.

**Table 4: Correlation Matrix \*\*  $p < 0.01$**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.Employee Emotional Competence	1				
2.Rapport	0.577**	1			
3.Personal loyalty	0.262**	0.253**	1		
4.Loyalty to company	0.520**	0.419**	0.451**	1	
5.Interpersonal self-consciousness	0.497**	0.506**	0.466**	0.703**	1

#### D. Reliability of Scales

To check the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha was computed. The results are depicted the Table 5. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for Employee Emotional Competence is 0.666. Cronbach's Alpha for rapport is 0.941. For Personal Loyalty its value is 0.758. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for Loyalty to company is 0.842 and for interpersonal self-consciousness it is 0.731.

**Table 5: Reliability of Scales**

S#	Scales	Items	Alpha
1	Employee Emotional Competence		
	i) Employee's perception of customer's emotions	4	.84
	ii) Employee understanding of customer's emotions	3	.817
	iii) Regulation of customer emotions	4	.844
2	Rapport	11	.853
3	Personal loyalty	4	.758
4	Loyalty to company	4	.842
5	Interpersonal self- consciousness	6	.731

#### E. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 states that Employee Emotional Competence has a significant relationship with rapport. Step 1 of step-wise regression model shows that Employee Emotional Competence significantly predicts rapport ( $\beta = 0.675$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2a states that Employee Emotional Competence significantly influences Personal Loyalty. For testing this hypothesis, step 2 of Table 6 is the relevant model. It is showing that Employee Emotional Competence is positively related with Personal Loyalty ( $\beta = 0.542$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the data supports the hypothesis 2a.

Hypothesis 2b states that Employee Emotional Competence significantly influences Personal Loyalty. For testing this hypothesis, step 2 of Table 7 is the relevant model. It is showing that Employee Emotional Competence is positively related with Loyalty to company ( $\beta = 0.549$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the data supports the hypothesis 2b.

Rapport as a Mediator between dependent variable (Employee Emotional Competence) and independent variables (Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company)

Hypothesis 3a states that rapport acts as a mediator between Employee Emotional Competence and Personal Loyalty. Hypothesis 3b states that rapport acts as a mediator between Employee Emotional Competence and Loyalty to company. Current study used step wise linear regression model to for testing these hypotheses. The values of mediation and the values of relationship among all the variables are listed in Table 6 and Table 7. Step 1 of model 1 Table 6 shows that there is a significant relationship between Employee Emotional Competence and rapport ( $\beta = 0.675$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, it fulfils the 1st condition of (Baron and Kenny, 1986). According to this condition the independent variable must have a significant impression on the mediator.

**Table 6. Step-wise Regression Model 1**

Dependent Variable	Rapport		Personal Loyalty			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	$\beta$	Sig
<b>Independent</b> Employee Emotional Competence	0.675	0.000	0.542	0.000	0.432	0.000
Mediator Rapport					0.167	0.001
F Statistics	148.930	0.000	121.637	0.000	68.956	0.000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.310		0.271		0.297	
$\Delta R^2$	0.308		0.268		0.292	

Step 2 of regression model (Table 6) shows that there is a significant relationship between Employee Emotional Competence and Personal Loyalty ( $\beta = 0.542$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Likewise Step 2 of regression model Table 7 exhibits a significant relationship between Employee Emotional Competence and Personal Loyalty ( $\beta = 0.549$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, it satisfies the 2nd condition of (Baron and Kenny, 1986) which says that dependent and independent variables should be significantly related.

Step 3 of Table 6 shows that rapport has a significant relation with Personal Loyalty ( $\beta = 0.167$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Likewise, step 3 of Table 7 shows that rapport has also a significant relation with Loyalty to company ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, it fulfils the 3<sup>rd</sup> condition of (Baron and Kenny, 1986). According to this condition the mediator should be significantly associated with the dependent variable

The regression model 1, in Step 3 Table 6 shows that Employee Emotional Competence still has a significant relation with Personal loyalty with controlling rapport as a mediator but the magnitude of this relationship has decreased ( $\beta = 0.432$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which shows that partial mediation has occurred because the influence of independent variable (Employee Emotional Competence) on the dependent variable (Personal Loyalty) has reduced. Moreover, rapport mediates the relationship Employee Emotional Competence and Personal Loyalty, as it changes the value of  $R^2$  from 27% to 27.8%. So, this data supports the Hypothesis 3a.

**Table7. Step-wise regression Model 2**

Dependent Variable	Rapport		Loyalty to company			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	$\beta$	Sig
<b>Independent</b> Employee Emotional Competence	0.675	0.000	0.549	0.000	0.522	0.000
<b>Mediator</b> Rapport					0.39	0.050
F Statistics	148.930	0.000	108.338	0.000	54.377	0.000
$R^2$	0.310		0.247		0.248	
$\Delta R^2$	0.308		0.244		0.243	

Likewise, the regression model 2, in Step 3 (Table 7) shows that Employee Emotional Competence still has a significant relation with Loyalty to company with controlling rapport as a mediator but the magnitude of this relationship has decreased ( $\beta = 0.522$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which shows that partial mediation has occurred because the influence of independent variable (Employee Emotional Competence) on the dependent variable (Loyalty to company) has reduced. Moreover, rapport mediates the relationship Employee Emotional Competence and Loyalty to company, as it changes the value of  $R^2$  from 24.7% to 24.4%. So, this data supports the Hypothesis 3b.

## 2. Interpersonal Self-consciousness as a Moderator

Hypothesis 5 states that Interpersonal Self-consciousness moderates the relationship between Employee Emotional Competence and rapport. For test this hypothesis, Step 3 of Table 8 is the relevant model. Step 3 of Table 8 is exhibiting that interaction term EEC X IPSC is significantly related to rapport ( $\beta = 0.098$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) showing that moderation is positive and significant. Therefore, it is found that our data supports the Hypothesis 5.

**Table 8. Hierarchical Linear Regression for Rapport**

Dependent Variable	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	$\beta$	Sig
Constant						
Independent Variable Employee Emotional Competence	0.675	0.000				
Moderator Interpersonal self consciousness			0.339	0.000		
Two Way Interaction EEC X IPSC					0.098	0.000
F Statistics	148.930		22.716		129.338	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.310		0.064		0.281	
$\Delta R^2$	0.308		0.061		0.279	

## 5. DISCUSSION

Current research was conducted to discover the moderating role of interpersonal self-consciousness of the customer during the service interactions in perspective of high contact services specifically beauty salon industry. Relationship between Employee Emotional Competence and Loyalty in perspective of beauty salon industry was investigated. In such type of industry, loyalty can have two objects. It can be the person/employee rendering services or it can be the company/salon. Mediating role of rapport between customer's perceived Employee Emotional Competence and Loyalty (Personal loyalty and Loyalty towards company) was tested. Relationship between both

independent variables i.e., Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company was examined. Results showed positive relationship of Employee Emotional Competence with the rapport, Personal Loyalty and Loyalty towards company. Rapport is found to positively impact Personal Loyalty and Loyalty towards company and it partially mediates the relation of Employee Emotional Competence with Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company. It is found that in beauty salon industry Personal Loyalty has a positive relation with the Loyalty towards company that means loyalty with the service provider helps to make the customer loyal to the company (salon). This finding contradicts with the study (Bove and Johnson, 2002), which states that customer's strong relationship with the employee may not truly contribute to make the employee loyal to the company.

Based on the literature available on the stated variables, it was predicted that Employee Emotional Competence would have a significant relation with the rapport. Empirical results of the study supported this prediction. Previous research proposes that interpersonal capabilities of emotionally intelligent people promote social success (Mcqueen and Mcqueen, 2004). According to (Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal, 1990) when people came across each other and they spend good time due to chemistry between them, then they click each other and experience the feeling of rapport. Relations that have harmony, mutual understanding and good communication in them are in fact good quality relations. When employees try their best to address the needs of the customer during service interaction, it leaves a positive impression on the customer and he perceives a strong bonding and affection with the service provider.

The current study provides empirical evidence that Employee Emotional Competence influences Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company as well. When an employee put some efforts to understand and solve the problem faced by the customer and make him satisfied, it helps to build customer loyalty. Human exchanges are just like give and take relationships in which both the parties try to reach a balance between what is being offered and what is being received. (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994) points out that when a party receives benefits, then it becomes obligatory on it to pay a cost for the benefits received. So, during the encounter of the customer with an emotionally competent employee, the customer may acknowledge an advantage and feels obliged to the employee. To payoff this debt, the customer shows more loyalty to the service employee to maintain the equilibrium in relationship. In personalized services, once an emotionally competent employee addresses the requirements of the customer, it creates personal loyalty.

The current study provides empirical evidence that rapport exists as a mediator between Employee Emotional Competence and Customer Loyalty (Personal Loyalty and Loyalty to company as well). Rapport reinforces the link between service employee and the customer (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000) Rapport may strengthen the relationship i.e., the level of commitment between customer and service employee (Liljander and Strandvik, 1995). Higher level of relationship commitment is linked with customer loyalty (Christopher et al., 1991). According to (Barnes, 1997), rapport between customer and

employee will result into repeat patronage. According to (Price and Arnould, 1999) in personalized services like hairstyling customer loyalty is the result of connecting or developing rapport with the hairstylist. According to (Matute, Palau-Saumell and Viglia, 2018) taking previous research under consideration it is believed that in personal training rapport and trust are the drivers of loyalty.

The current study provides empirical evidence that interpersonal self-consciousness exists as a moderator between Employee Emotional Competence and rapport. In general people are bothered when they are observed by the people belonging to high status and rank (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Salespeople cannot be ignored in the social context of the store, so customer's self-consciousness is increased when they are being observed by them (Uhrich and Tombs, 2014). Being observed by salesperson can disturb the customer psychologically (Buss, 1980; Uhrich and Luck, 2012). According to (Grace, 2007) service personnel are the reason of 66% of all the humiliating events in consumption settings, they cause customer embarrassment via nonverbal acts like making customer the central point of attention. Customers may feel themselves under pressure, like they have to pose that they have real intention to buy the products irrespective of the fact that they did not intend to buy (Uehara, 1995; Uhrich and Luck, 2012).

The current study provides empirical evidence that personal loyalty influences loyalty to company significantly and positively. According to (Bove and Johnson, 2006), if a customer is loyal to the specific employee, this loyalty may also be fruitful toward the company. By the process of affect transfer, the customer's positive attitude towards service provider will directly contribute to the positive image formation of the firm in the customer's mind. However, other researchers do not support this notion; they suggest that if a customer has strong relationship with employee, it does not necessarily mean that this relationship always generate loyalty to the firm (Bendapudi and Leone, 2002). When an employee leaves the workplace, the customer may choose to follow that employee in the new workplace to get the services. In this way personal loyalty can make customer retention endangered.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

This study has various implications for researchers and practitioners as well. It reveals the positive relationship between interpersonal self-consciousness and rapport. Further it revealed a positive relationship between Personal Loyalty (Loyalty towards service employee) and the Loyalty towards the service provider (Beauty Salon). It provides evidence for the employees to draw their attention on identifying during a service interaction, whether the customer is having high in interpersonal self-consciousness or low. In case, if it high, a rapport-based relationship will be built and the customer will engage in loyalty relationship as well. But if the customer is having low interpersonal self-consciousness, the employee should use his skills to interpret and comprehend the state of the customer. He should efficiently interpret the feelings and needs of the customer, to

make the customer feel easy and to bring a feeling of a good and pleasurable service interaction. In this way an emotionally competent employee can widen the database of the customers for the service provider. So emotionally competent employees seem to be the part and parcel for service interactions to make every interaction as pleasurable as possible. Because only such type of employee build rapport and loyalty relationship that proves to be fruitful for the company in the short as well as long run. Service industries should focus on employees training for making them emotionally competent.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study indicates the importance of the emotionally competent employees in context of beauty salon industry. It is easy for the employees to interact with the customers who have high interpersonal self-consciousness in contrast with the customers who have low interpersonal self-consciousness. The study also debates that such employees play the prime role in expanding the customer base of the company by making the service interaction memorable and pleasurable for the customer. This study has several limitations, firstly, current study focuses on one specific service industry having high-contact with the customers. Future research could be done in standardized and impersonal services including other variables like age, gender and cross-cultural differences. Secondly, this research collected data through convenience sampling so the finding can't be generalized. Thirdly, there is researcher's own restriction regarding length of survey.

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