

Beauty expo participation and growth outcomes of local cosmetic SMEs in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to analyze the impact of beauty expo participation on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs, focusing on sales growth, brand awareness, and market access expansion.

Method: this study employs a quantitative, explanatory research design. Data were collected from 30 local cosmetic SMEs in Medan city who had participated in beauty expos or similar promotional events, using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine respondents' perceptions of the relationship between event participation and SME growth, as measured by sales growth, brand awareness, and market access.

Findings: participation in beauty expos has a positive impact on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs in Medan city. These results suggest that beauty expo participation contributes to improved sales performance, increased brand recognition, and expanded business networks among local cosmetic SMEs.

Implications: participation in beauty expos is an effective marketing strategy for local cosmetic SMEs to enhance sales performance, strengthen brand awareness, and expand market access. The findings highlight the importance of integrating event marketing into SME growth strategies and provide practical insights for business owners and policymakers to support SME development through promotional events.

Originality: examining beauty expo participation as a driver of SME growth (sales, brand awareness, and market access) in local cosmetic SMEs in Medan city, an underexplored context in prior research.



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Introduction

The local cosmetics industry in Indonesia has experienced rapid growth in recent years, driven by rising public awareness of beauty and personal care products (Pribadi & Sila, 2023). This situation presents significant opportunities for local cosmetic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to expand their market share. However, the

growing number of business players also leads to fiercer competition, requiring SMEs to develop effective marketing strategies to remain competitive (Amadasun & Mutezo, 2022). One of the main challenges faced by local cosmetic SMEs is building brand awareness, increasing sales, and expanding market access amidst the dominance of major brands with stronger marketing resources (Zhao, 2025). In this context, participation in exhibitions or beauty expos is an alternative marketing strategy that allows businesses to introduce their products directly to consumers, distributors, and potential business partners.

The phenomenon shows that beauty events, local product exhibitions, and beauty expos are increasingly held in cities across Indonesia, including Medan. These events not only promote products but also serve as a forum for direct interaction between businesses and consumers. Through exhibition participation, SMEs can gain broader brand exposure, build relationships with customers, and secure business partnership opportunities (Fready et al., 2022). However, not all SMEs participating in exhibitions achieve optimal results. Some businesses still face obstacles in converting event participation into increased sales, strengthened brand awareness, or expanded market access. Therefore, an empirical study is needed to understand the extent to which participation in beauty expos impacts the growth of local cosmetic SMEs.

Various previous studies have demonstrated that event marketing plays a crucial role in building brand awareness and improving marketing performance. Vo et al. (2025) found that event marketing positively influences brand awareness. Yunus et al. (2026) stated that event-based marketing activities can create stronger consumer engagement and brand experiences. Mehta & Jain (2026) also found that well-designed events can enhance brand presence amidst intense competition. Meanwhile, Khan (2023); Higón & Bonvin (2024) demonstrated that participation in trade shows improves market performance in both domestic and international markets. However, most of these studies focus on the influence of event marketing on brand awareness or overall marketing performance, while research specifically examining the impact of beauty expo participation on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs through indicators such as sales, brand awareness, and market access remains relatively limited. Furthermore, research on local cosmetic SMEs in Medan remains rare. Therefore, this study offers a novel integration of these three dimensions of business growth into a single research model in the context of local cosmetic SMEs participating in beauty expos.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the influence of participation in beauty expos or exhibitions on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs in Medan. Specifically, this study aims to examine the effects of event participation on sales, brand awareness, and market access. By examining these three aspects, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of exhibition participation as a marketing strategy for local cosmetic SMEs. This research is important because the results can provide empirical evidence regarding the strategic benefits of participation in beauty expos for the growth of local cosmetic SMEs. From an academic perspective, this study is expected to enrich the literature on event marketing, brand awareness, and SME development, particularly in the local cosmetics sector. From a practical perspective, the research results can be used by SMEs to inform more effective marketing strategies, as well as by exhibition organizers and local governments to inform more targeted SME development programs. Thus, this research is expected to make a real contribution to improving the competitiveness and sustainability of local cosmetic SMEs in Medan.

Literature review

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) theory

Schultz et al. (1993) first developed the theory of integrated marketing communication (IMC), emphasizing the importance of integrating various marketing communication activities to deliver a consistent message to consumers. IMC explains that companies need to use a range of communication channels, including advertising, sales promotions, public relations, digital marketing, and event marketing, to build strong relationships with consumers and achieve marketing objectives effectively. From an IMC perspective, event marketing is a marketing communication instrument that can create direct interactions between companies and consumers. Unlike conventional promotional media, which are one-way, events provide real-life experiences for consumers, enabling brand messages to be received more effectively. By participating in beauty expos, local cosmetic SMEs can introduce their products directly, build brand awareness, expand business networks, and increase purchase chances. IMC theory holds that the effectiveness of a marketing activity is not measured solely by increased sales, but also by its ability to increase brand awareness and expand market access. Therefore, this theory serves as the main foundation in research to explain the relationship between participation in beauty expos and the growth of local cosmetic SMEs as measured by sales, brand awareness, and market access.

Event participation

Event participation is a marketing strategy that involves organizing activities to bring companies directly together with their target consumers (Suryana, 2022). These activities can include exhibitions, bazaars, festivals, product launches, or beauty expos. Event participation aims to create a memorable experience for consumers through direct interaction with the product or brand (Altschwager et al., 2024). This strategy allows consumers to obtain more in-depth information than through advertising or digital promotions. Through events, companies can conduct product demonstrations, provide consultations, distribute product samples, and build emotional connections with consumers (Pirraglia et al., 2023). In the context of local cosmetic SMEs, beauty expos are a form of event marketing with great potential because they bring together business actors with consumers, distributors, resellers, influencers, and investors in one location. Therefore, event participation can be an effective way to increase brand exposure and expand business opportunities. The event participation indicators used in this study include: intensity of event participation; interaction with visitors; promotional effectiveness during the event; increased consumer trust; and the quality of product presentation at the booth.

Business growth

Business growth is a condition that indicates an increase in business performance over time (G. Zhou et al., 2022). According to business growth theory, a business is said to be developing if it increases operational capacity and achieves better results than in the previous period (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). Growth is an important indicator because it reflects a company's strategy's success in competing in the market. In this study, business growth is measured through three main indicators deemed relevant to the research objectives: increased sales, increased brand awareness, and expanded market access.

Increased sales

Sales are the activity of exchanging products or services that generate revenue for a company (Sutaguna et al., 2023). Sales growth is the increase in transaction value a company achieves over a specific period (Santioso, 2025). The higher the sales level, the greater the business's ability to generate revenue and maintain business continuity. Participation in beauty expos allows SMEs to introduce products directly to potential consumers, thereby increasing the chances of purchases during and after the event. Furthermore, positive experiences consumers have during the event can increase customer loyalty, which in turn impacts long-term sales growth (Huang & Kim, 2023). Sales indicators in this study include: increased sales turnover; increased number of transactions; the addition of new customers; increased repeat purchases; and increased product demand.

Brand awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of consumers to recognize and recall a brand when faced with a particular product category (Bergkvist & Taylor, 2022). Brand awareness is the initial stage of the purchasing decision-making process, as consumers tend to choose brands they are already familiar with (Widayat et al., 2022). According to the concept developed by Aaker (2025), brand awareness consists of several levels: unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. The higher the level of brand awareness, the greater the likelihood that consumers will choose a product. In the highly competitive cosmetics industry, brand awareness is a crucial factor given the numerous product alternatives available. Through beauty expos, SMEs can introduce their brands directly to consumers, provide product-use experiences, and build positive brand perceptions. Indicators of brand awareness include: brand recognition by consumers; consumer recall of the brand; consumer familiarity with the brand; the ability to differentiate the brand from competitors; and improved brand image.

Market access

Market access is a company's ability to reach consumers and gain broader distribution opportunities (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024). Market access relates not only to the number of customers reached but also to the company's ability to build a business network and expand its marketing area (Ababouch et al., 2023). For SMEs, market access is a critical factor determining business sustainability. Limited distribution networks are often a major obstacle for SMEs in scaling their businesses. Therefore, a strategy is needed that can connect business actors with various parties with potential for collaboration. Participation in beauty expos allows SMEs to meet directly with distributors, resellers, marketing agents, investors, and consumers from various regions. This interaction can open up new collaboration opportunities that support market expansion and business growth. Market access indicators in this study include: increasing customer networks; increasing business relationships; new collaboration opportunities; expanding marketing areas; and improving distribution channels.

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The quantitative approach was chosen because the study aims to objectively examine the relationship and influence of participation in beauty expo events on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs, using numerical data obtained from respondents. Explanatory research is used to establish the causal relationship between independent and dependent

variables by testing formulated hypotheses. In this study, the independent variable is participation in beauty expo or exhibition events. In contrast, the dependent variable comprises SME growth, measured by increased sales, brand awareness, and market access. The study was conducted in Medan, North Sumatra province. The location was selected purposively, given that Medan is a growth center for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including those in the cosmetics and beauty products sector.

The population in this study was all local cosmetic SMEs in Medan who had participated in beauty expos, product exhibitions, bazaars, or similar promotional activities. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which selects samples based on specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives. The respondent criteria used were as follows: owners or managers of local cosmetic SMEs domiciled in Medan; have participated in beauty expos, exhibitions, bazaars, or product promotional events at least once in the last 2 years; and are willing to serve as research respondents by completing a questionnaire. Based on these criteria, the number of respondents was 30.

This study used two data sources: primary and secondary. Primary data were collected directly from respondents via questionnaires distributed to local cosmetic SMEs that met the research criteria. Primary data were used to measure respondents' perceptions regarding participation in beauty expos and their impact on business growth. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from various sources, including scientific journals and academic publications, relevant to the research topic. Secondary data were used to strengthen the theoretical foundation and support the interpretation of the research results. The data collection method used in this study was a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was compiled based on predetermined indicators for each research variable. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and directly to the SMEs who served as research respondents.

The research instrument used a five-point Likert Scale to measure respondents' level of agreement with each statement. The answer categories consisted of: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The Likert Scale was chosen because it can systematically measure respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences and is easy to analyze. The data obtained in this study were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to describe and explain the data obtained from respondents, based on the questionnaire results. The collected data were then processed into percentages and average values (means) to determine the tendency of respondents' responses to each statement.

Results and discussion

This study was conducted on local cosmetic SMEs in Medan who had participated in exhibitions, bazaars, or similar promotional activities. Data were collected via an online questionnaire on Google Forms. Thirty respondents met the research criteria. The data revealed diverse characteristics across business duration and product types. The majority of respondents were entrepreneurs who had been operating for 1–3 years, indicating that most SMEs were still in the early stages of development. In terms of product types, the majority of respondents were engaged in skincare, followed by body care and makeup products. The respondents' participation in exhibitions indicates that they have utilized offline marketing strategies to increase sales and expand their business networks. This serves as an important basis for analyzing the impact of events on SME growth.

Descriptive analysis results

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the tendency of respondents' answers to the research variables consisting of event participation, sales, brand awareness, and market access. Measurements were conducted using a Likert scale of 1–5, with the following interpretation categories: 1.00–1.80 = very low; 1.81–2.60 = low; 2.61–3.40 = moderate; 3.41–4.20 = high; 4.21–5.00 = very high.

Table 1 results of descriptive analysis of event participation

Indicator	Mean	Category
Intensity of event participation	4.18	High
Interaction with visitors	4.25	Very high
Effectiveness of promotions during the event	4.12	High
Increased consumer confidence	4.30	Very high
Quality of product presentation at the booth	4.22	Very high
Average event participation	4.21	Very high

Source: primary data, processed

The distribution of respondents' answers shows that 68% of respondents agreed and 24% strongly agreed with the benefits of participating in exhibition events. Meanwhile, 6% of respondents gave neutral answers, and only 2% disagreed. Based on Table 1, the average event participation score of 4.21 indicates that respondents had a very positive perception of participating in beauty expos or exhibitions. The indicator with the highest score was increased consumer trust (mean = 4.30), indicating that consumers were more confident in the product after seeing and trying it firsthand. These results indicate that events are an effective promotional tool for local cosmetic SMEs in building customer relationships.

Table 2 results of descriptive analysis of sales increase

Indicator	Mean	Category
Increased sales turnover	4.08	High
Increased number of transactions	4.15	High
Addition of new customers	4.26	Very high
Increased repeat purchases	3.95	High
Increased product demand	4.11	High
Average increase in sales	4.11	High

Source: primary data, processed

The distribution of respondents' answers shows that 65% agreed and 21% strongly agreed that sales increased after participating in the exhibition. 10% of respondents were neutral, and 4% disagreed. Table 2 shows that the average sales increase of 4.11 indicates that participation in the event positively affected sales for local cosmetic SMEs. The indicator with the highest score was the addition of new customers (mean = 4.26). This indicates that the event not only generated transactions during the event but also attracted new customers who have the potential to become repeat customers.

Table 3 results of descriptive analysis of brand awareness

Indicator	Mean	Category
Consumer brand recognition	4.28	Very high
Consumer recall of the brand	4.17	High
Consumer familiarity with the brand	4.22	Very high
Ability to distinguish the brand from competitors	4.05	High
Brand image enhancement	4.24	Very high
Average brand awareness	4.19	High

Source: primary data, processed

The distribution of responses shows that 66% of respondents agreed and 25% strongly agreed that exhibition events help increase brand awareness. Seven percent of respondents were neutral, and 2% disagreed. Based on Table 3, the average score of 4.19 indicates that exhibition events significantly increase brand awareness for local cosmetic SMEs. The highest indicator was consumer brand recognition (mean = 4.28). This suggests that direct interaction at events helps consumers better recognize and remember brands than promotions through other media.

Table 4 results of descriptive analysis of market access

Indicator	Mean	Category
Expanding customer network	4.20	High
Increasing business relationships	4.32	Very high
New collaboration opportunities	4.27	Very high
Expanding marketing areas	4.08	High
Increasing distribution channels	4.01	High
Average market access	4.18	High

Source: primary data, processed

The distribution of responses shows that 67% of respondents agreed and 23% strongly agreed that participating in events helps expand market access. Eight percent of respondents were neutral, and 2% disagreed. Based on Table 4, the average value of the market access variable, 4.18, indicates that exhibition events are an effective means of expanding SME business networks. The indicator with the highest value is the increase in business relations (mean = 4.32), indicating that events provide opportunities for business actors to establish relationships with distributors, resellers, suppliers, and other business partners. With a wider business network, SMEs have greater opportunities to grow and increase their competitiveness.

Table 5 summarizes the mean values of the research variables

Variables	Mean	Category
Event participation	4.21	Very high
Increased sales	4.11	High
Brand awareness	4.19	High
Market access	4.18	High

Source: primary data, processed

Based on the recapitulation results in Table 5, event participation achieved the highest average score of 4.21, which is in the very high category. Meanwhile, the three SME growth indicators, sales increase (4.11), brand awareness (4.19), and market access (4.18), were in the high category. These findings indicate that participation in beauty expos or exhibition events is perceived to provide significant benefits for the growth of local cosmetic SMEs, particularly in increasing brand exposure, expanding business networks, and driving increased sales.

The influence of participation in events on increasing sales

The results of the study indicate that participation in beauty expos and exhibition events positively contributes to increased sales for local cosmetic SMEs in Medan. This finding is reflected in the average sales increase variable of 4.11, which falls in the high category. Furthermore, 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in events can increase their business sales. The indicator with the highest average value was the addition of new customers (mean = 4.26), indicating that events not only

generate transactions during the activity but also can create sustainable sales opportunities through new customer acquisition.

These findings indicate that exhibition events serve as an effective marketing medium for connecting SMEs directly with potential consumers. In the cosmetics industry, purchasing decisions are often influenced by consumer experience with a product, such as viewing the packaging, tasting the texture, smelling the fragrance, or receiving in-person consultations about its benefits. These advantages cannot be fully achieved through digital marketing. Therefore, the face-to-face interactions that occur during events are a crucial factor in driving increased purchasing interest and ultimately increasing product sales.

The results of this study are in line with the IMC theory, which holds that the success of marketing communications is not determined solely by the use of a single communication channel, but by integrating various forms of marketing communications that convey brand messages effectively to consumers. In the context of this study, beauty expos are one of the marketing communications instruments that allow SMEs to convey product information directly to the target market. The interactions that occur during the event can create a stronger experience than conventional promotions, thereby increasing consumer confidence in making purchases (Wu & Huang, 2023). Thus, the results of this study support the basic assumption of the IMC theory that event marketing activities can have a real impact on a company's marketing performance, particularly on sales.

The results of this study also reinforce the notion that sales growth is a key indicator of a successful marketing strategy. Increased sales occur when a company creates value and provides a positive consumer experience (Pappas et al., 2023). By participating in events, SMEs can introduce products more comprehensively, demonstrate product use, distribute samples, and answer consumer questions directly. These activities help reduce consumer uncertainty about the product and increase the likelihood of a purchase. Therefore, events serve not only as a promotional medium but also as a means of education and building consumer trust, which contributes to increased sales.

The findings of this study are also consistent with various previous studies. Research by Bailia et al. (2025) found that event marketing can increase consumer engagement, which, in turn, increases purchase interest in promoted products. Furthermore, Kapoor & Joshi (2024) found in their study on company participation in trade shows that exhibition participation is positively associated with improved market performance, including increased sales volume. Research by Bruckberger et al. (2023) also showed that attractively designed events can increase consumer interest in a product and encourage purchases. The similarity of these research results indicates that event marketing is a relevant and effective strategy for supporting business growth, both for large companies and SMEs.

The findings of this study also align with on-the-ground conditions, particularly in the local cosmetics sector. Cosmetic consumers today tend to be more selective in their product choices due to concerns about skin health and safety. Before making a purchase, consumers often seek more detailed information about product ingredients, benefits, certifications, and user testimonials. Through beauty expos, SMEs can provide direct explanations to consumers, thereby increasing trust in their products. Furthermore, events provide consumers with the opportunity to try products before purchase, which can ultimately expedite the decision-making process. This explains why most respondents experienced an increase in sales after attending events.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study imply that participation in beauty expos should not be viewed solely as a short-term promotional activity, but as a marketing investment capable of generating long-term economic benefits. Local cosmetic SMEs need to develop a more strategic approach to event participation, including attractive booth design, product sampling, event-specific discount programs, and customer data collection for follow-up marketing. Furthermore, SMEs need to integrate offline activities during the event with digital marketing on social media, marketplaces, and other communication platforms to maintain customer relationships after the event ends.

For future development, local cosmetic SMEs need to improve the quality of their event participation by utilizing digital technology and more innovative experiential marketing strategies. This includes interactive product demonstrations, the use of influencers or beauty consultants during events, and the provision of personalized experiences for booth visitors. Furthermore, event organizers need to provide a platform that connects SMEs with potential distributors, resellers, and investors, ensuring that the benefits are not only short-term sales increases but also the development of sustainable business networks. Therefore, participation in beauty expos can be a strategic tool that supports the sustainable growth and competitiveness of local cosmetic SMEs.

The influence of participation in events on increasing brand awareness

The results of the study indicate that participation in beauty expos and exhibition events positively contributes to increasing brand awareness among local cosmetic SMEs in Medan. This finding is evident in the average value of the brand awareness variable, 4.19, which falls in the high category. In addition, 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participating in events increases brand recognition among consumers. The indicator with the highest average value was brand recognition by consumers (mean = 4.28), followed by improved brand image (mean = 4.24) and consumer familiarity with the brand (mean = 4.22). These findings indicate that exhibition events not only serve as a means of product promotion but also as an effective communication medium for introducing and strengthening brand positioning in consumers' minds.

Empirically, this study's results indicate that participation in beauty expos can increase brand exposure among consumers who are previously unfamiliar with local cosmetic SME products. When consumers visit exhibition booths, they can directly see the brand identity through logos, packaging designs, booth concepts, promotional materials, and interactions with marketing staff (Bauer & Hantel, 2022). Repeated exposure to these brand elements helps consumers recognize and remember the brand better. In the highly competitive cosmetics industry, a brand's ability to be recognized and remembered by consumers is a crucial asset that can influence future purchasing decisions.

The findings of this study align with the IMC Theory, which explains that various marketing communication activities must be integrated to convey a consistent brand message to consumers. One important instrument in IMC is event marketing, as it enables direct communication between the company and the target market. Unlike one-way advertising, events offer consumers the opportunity to experience the brand firsthand through real-life interactions. In the context of this study, beauty expos serve as a communication medium that enables local cosmetic SMEs to build closer relationships with consumers, thereby enabling brand messages to be received, understood, and remembered more effectively. Therefore, the results of this study

support the IMC theory's assumption that event marketing is an effective marketing communication strategy for increasing brand awareness.

The results of this study indicate that participation in events increases brand awareness at various levels, from brand recognition to brand recall. Through events, consumers who were previously unfamiliar with a brand can begin to recognize its existence (brand recognition). Furthermore, deeper interactions during exhibitions allow consumers to recall the brand when faced with the same product category (brand recall) (L. Zhou et al., 2024). In some cases, memorable experiences during events can even help a brand achieve a top-of-mind position, that is, becoming the first brand that comes to consumers' minds when thinking about a particular cosmetic product. Therefore, exhibition events are a strategic means of building and strengthening brand equity by increasing brand awareness.

The results of this study also reinforce various previous studies that show a positive relationship between event marketing and brand awareness. Research by Suryana (2022) found that event marketing significantly influences brand awareness by enabling consumers to interact directly with products and brands. Research by Altschwager et al. (2024) shows that event-based marketing activities can create stronger emotional engagement than other promotional media, thereby increasing consumers' ability to recognize and remember brands. Furthermore, research by Garg & Modi (2025) explains that attractively designed events can enhance brand presence amidst increasingly competitive markets. The similarity between these results and previous research indicates that event marketing is an effective strategy for building brand awareness, especially for businesses still in the growth stage, such as local cosmetics SMEs.

The findings of this study also align with the reality on the ground. In the cosmetics industry, consumers purchase products not only for their functions but also for their brand perception. Many consumers prefer well-known brands because they are perceived as more trustworthy and of better quality (Sung et al., 2023). However, one of the biggest challenges facing local cosmetics SMEs is low brand recognition compared to national and international brands that have larger promotional budgets. In this context, beauty expos are an effective way to introduce brands to a wider audience. Through exhibitions, consumers can see products firsthand, learn about their benefits, and interact with brand owners or representatives. These firsthand experiences help build positive perceptions and increase the likelihood that consumers will remember the brand after the event ends.

From a managerial perspective, this study's findings suggest that local cosmetic SMEs should leverage beauty expos as part of their long-term brand-building strategy. Participation in events should not only focus on achieving sales targets during the event but also on strengthening brand identity (Suryana, 2022). Therefore, SMEs need to pay attention to various branding elements such as logo design, product packaging, booth displays, slogans, promotional materials, and the experience provided to visitors during the event. The more consistent and engaging the brand identity displayed, the greater the chance that consumers will recognize and remember the brand.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the success of an event in increasing brand awareness is determined not only by attendance but also by the quality of interactions built with visitors. Therefore, SMEs need to improve their communication and service capabilities during the exhibition to ensure consumers have a positive brand experience. Social media usage during and after the event also needs to be optimized to strengthen the exposure gained during the event. Strategies such as live

promotions, giveaways, interactive activities, and collaborations with influencers can help expand brand reach to a wider audience.

For future development, local cosmetic SMEs should integrate beauty expos with digital marketing strategies to sustain longer-lasting brand awareness. Events should not be viewed as stand-alone activities, but rather as part of an ongoing series of branding activities. After the event, businesses should follow up through social media, email marketing, customer loyalty programs, and other communication channels to maintain relationships with consumers who are already familiar with their brand. Thus, the increased brand awareness gained through beauty expos can develop into brand loyalty and ultimately contribute to sustainable business growth.

The influence of participation in events on expanding market access

The results of the study indicate that participation in beauty expos and exhibition events contributes to expanding market access for local cosmetic SMEs in Medan. This finding is indicated by the average market access variable value of 4.18, which falls in the high category. In addition, as many as 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in events benefits business networking and opens new market opportunities. The indicator with the highest average value was the increase in business relations (mean = 4.32), followed by new collaboration opportunities (mean = 4.27) and an increase in customer networks (mean = 4.20). These results indicate that the benefits of events are not limited to promotional and sales activities but can also create strategic opportunities that support market expansion and long-term business growth.

These findings indicate that beauty expos serve as a platform for bringing together various parties involved in the cosmetics business chain, from end consumers, distributors, resellers, marketing agents, suppliers, and investors. Through interactions at these events, SMEs can expand their professional networks, potentially supporting business development. Unlike digital marketing, which generally focuses on the relationship between sellers and consumers, events enable the creation of broader, multidimensional business relationships (McKee et al., 2025). Therefore, participating in these events can be a strategic step for SMEs to gain access to previously unreachable markets.

The results of this study align with IMC Theory, in which marketing communications aim not only to convey information to consumers but also to build long-term relationships with various stakeholders relevant to the company. Event marketing is a form of marketing communication that can facilitate direct interaction and create stronger relationships than other communication media. Through beauty expos, local cosmetic SMEs can communicate directly with various parties who could support business development. Thus, the results of this study strengthen the IMC theory's view that event marketing not only produces communication impacts but also strategic benefits, such as network expansion and market access.

The results of this study indicate that market access is not only measured by a company's ability to sell products to consumers, but also by its capacity to build distribution networks and business relationships that support business sustainability. Market access theory holds that the broader a company's network, the greater its opportunities to reach new markets and expand its business scale (Tajpour et al., 2022). In this study, participation in beauty expos was shown to help SMEs acquire new customers, establish relationships with potential business partners, and expand distribution opportunities. This condition indicates that events serve as platforms that accelerate market expansion by fostering stronger business networks.

Various previous studies also support this study's findings. Dana et al. (2022) study showed that participation in trade shows positively contributes to a company's market performance by opening access to both domestic and international markets. The study explained that exhibitions are an effective means of connecting business actors with potential buyers and business partners from various regions. Furthermore, Park et al. (2022) study found that integrated event marketing can increase a company's opportunities to expand its marketing network and build sustainable business relationships. Ziakas (2023) study also showed that events create broader engagement between companies and various stakeholders, thus supporting long-term market development. The similarity between these findings and previous research indicates that event marketing is an effective strategy for expanding market access for businesses.

The findings of this study also align with on-the-ground conditions, particularly in the local cosmetics sector. One of the main obstacles cosmetics SMEs often face is limited distribution networks and limited access to broader markets. Many SMEs market their products only in specific regions due to limited resources, business networks, and market information (Chen et al., 2023). In this situation, beauty expos provide a platform for business actors to meet directly with potential collaborators. Many SMEs have acquired new resellers and distributors, and even gained opportunities to enter markets outside their region, after attending exhibitions. Furthermore, the presence of influencers, beauty communities, and media outlets at events also helps expand the reach of product information to a wider market. This situation demonstrates that exhibitions play a crucial role in overcoming the market access barriers often faced by SMEs.

From a managerial perspective, the results of this study imply that local cosmetic SMEs should view beauty expos as a means of developing business networks, not merely for product promotion. Many businesses focus on achieving sales targets during the event, yet the greatest opportunities often stem from business relationships established after the event concludes. Therefore, SMEs need to be more active in networking with distributors, resellers, suppliers, the business community, and potential investors attending exhibitions. The ability to build professional relationships is a crucial factor in maximizing the benefits of event participation in expanding market access.

Furthermore, SMEs need to prepare a follow-up strategy after the event concludes. The contact information of potential business partners, resellers, and customers obtained during the event must be properly managed to develop sustainable partnerships. The use of digital technologies such as customer relationship management (CRM), social media, and business communication platforms can help businesses maintain relationships with the networks established during the event (AlShawabkeh et al., 2023). Thus, the benefits of the event do not stop during the event but continue to impact future market expansion.

For future development, local cosmetic SMEs should be more selective in choosing events to participate in, considering the profile of attendees, the organizer's reputation, and the potential for business networking. Furthermore, beauty expo organizers should strengthen their business-matching function by offering specialized sessions that connect SMEs with distributors, retailers, investors, and other strategic partners. Support from local governments and related institutions is also needed to expand SME participation in regional and national events, thereby increasing market access opportunities. By leveraging events to network and expand markets, local cosmetic SMEs will have greater opportunities to increase competitiveness, expand their marketing reach, and achieve sustainable business growth.

Conclusions

This study aims to analyze the effect of participation in beauty expos or exhibition events on the growth of local cosmetic SMEs in Medan, measured by increased sales, brand awareness, and market access. The results show that participation in events has a positive impact on all three aspects. Event participation obtained the highest average score of 4.21, which is in the very high category, while increased sales (4.11), brand awareness (4.19), and market access (4.18) are in the high category. These findings indicate that beauty expos not only serve as a means of product promotion but also as an effective marketing communication medium for increasing brand exposure, attracting new customers, strengthening relationships with consumers, and opening opportunities for collaboration and broader business networks for local cosmetic SMEs.

The study results strengthen the relevance of IMC Theory, which explains that event marketing is a marketing communication instrument capable of creating direct interaction between companies and consumers, thereby improving marketing performance. Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence that participation in beauty expos can be used as an effective marketing strategy for local cosmetic SMEs to increase sales, build brand awareness, and expand market access. However, this study has several limitations, namely the relatively small number of respondents (30 SMEs), the study's scope, which covers only the city of Medan, and the use of descriptive analysis, which is unable to statistically inferentially measure the magnitude of the influence between variables. In addition, this study focuses solely on the perceptions of business actors and does not consider the perspective of consumers, the recipients of these marketing activities.

It is recommended that further study use a larger sample size and involve respondents from various regions to ensure greater generalizability. Future research could also employ more comprehensive analytical methods, such as regression, structural equation modeling (SEM), or partial least squares (PLS), to examine causal relationships between variables in greater depth. Furthermore, other variables that may influence successful event participation, such as service quality, product innovation, digital marketing, customer engagement, and customer loyalty, could be added to gain a broader understanding of the factors supporting the growth of local cosmetic SMEs. Therefore, further research is expected to produce a more comprehensive model to explain the effectiveness of event marketing as a business development strategy.

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