

The Correlation Between Customer Satisfaction and Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

Employee engagement is widely recognized as a key factor influencing organizational performance in service-oriented industries, particularly in hospitality where employees directly interact with customers. The attitudes, motivation, and involvement of employees significantly shape customer experiences and satisfaction. While previous studies have examined service quality and customer satisfaction extensively, limited research has explored the direct relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in hospitality contexts. This study investigates this relationship and examines the mediating role of service quality. Using a quantitative approach, survey data were collected from hospitality employees and customers. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied for analysis. The results indicate that employee engagement positively influences service quality and customer satisfaction, with service quality partially mediating this relationship, highlighting its importance for improving hospitality service performance.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry, Service Quality, Service Management

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is widely recognized as one of the most service-intensive sectors in the global economy. Unlike manufacturing industries where products are tangible, standardized, and produced separately from consumption, hospitality services are largely intangible and are delivered and consumed simultaneously. Because of this unique characteristic, service delivery relies heavily on human interaction between employees and customers. Employees in hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality establishments serve as the primary interface between the organization and its customers. Their attitudes, communication skills, and behavior directly shape the service experience and significantly influence how customers perceive service quality and organizational value [1,2]. As a result, the performance and engagement of employees play a central role in determining customer satisfaction and overall organizational success in the hospitality industry.

Customer satisfaction has long been considered a fundamental indicator of service quality and organizational effectiveness in service-based industries. It refers to the overall evaluation of a service experience based on the comparison between customer expectations and perceived service performance [3]. When customers perceive that the service they receive meets or exceeds their expectations, they are more likely to report higher satisfaction levels.

High levels of customer satisfaction are associated with several positive outcomes, including customer loyalty, repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth communication, and increased organizational profitability [4,5]. In hospitality settings, satisfied customers often become loyal guests who repeatedly visit the same hotel or restaurant and recommend the service provider to others. Consequently, maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction has become a strategic priority for hospitality organizations seeking to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized and customer-driven market [6]. One of the key organizational factors that influence customer satisfaction is employee engagement. Employee engagement refers to the psychological, emotional, and cognitive connection that employees develop with their work and organization. Engaged employees typically demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm, dedication, and involvement in their work roles. According to Kahn's engagement theory, employees who are psychologically present in their roles are more likely to invest their energy, creativity, and commitment into their work activities [7]. Later research expanded this concept by identifying several dimensions of engagement, including vigor, dedication, and absorption, which collectively describe the extent to which employees feel energetic, committed, and deeply involved in their work [8].

In hospitality organizations, employee engagement is particularly important because employees are responsible for delivering personalized services and maintaining positive relationships with customers. Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate proactive behavior, empathy, and attentiveness during service encounters. These characteristics can significantly enhance customer experiences and contribute to higher perceptions of service quality [9]. Studies have shown that employees who feel motivated and supported by their organizations tend to exhibit greater customer orientation and are more willing to go beyond their formal job responsibilities to meet customer needs [10]. Such behaviors not only improve the immediate service experience but also strengthen the long-term relationship between customers and the organization. The relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction is often explained through the service-profit chain framework, which suggests that internal organizational factors such as employee satisfaction, engagement, and workplace support influence service quality and customer outcomes [11]. According to this perspective, organizations that invest in employee well-being and engagement are more likely to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction and improved financial performance. Engaged employees tend to provide more attentive and responsive services, which increases the likelihood that customers will evaluate their experiences positively. Previous research has provided evidence supporting the link between employee attitudes and customer outcomes. Studies conducted in various service industries have found that higher levels of employee engagement are associated with improved service performance, greater customer satisfaction, and stronger customer loyalty [12,13]. In hospitality contexts, employees often serve as the “face” of the organization, meaning that their behavior and emotional expressions significantly influence customer perceptions of service quality [14]. Consequently, understanding how employee engagement affects customer satisfaction is essential for hospitality managers who aim to improve service performance and maintain competitive advantage.

Despite the growing interest in employee engagement and its impact on service performance, empirical research examining the direct relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry remains relatively limited. Many existing studies focus primarily on service quality or employee satisfaction without fully exploring how engagement influences customer perceptions. Furthermore, the potential mediating role of service quality in linking employee engagement with customer satisfaction has not been sufficiently examined in hospitality research. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry. Specifically, the study investigates whether employee engagement positively influences customer satisfaction and explores the role of service quality as a mediating factor in this relationship [12]. By analyzing these relationships, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence that contributes to the existing literature on hospitality

management and service performance. In addition, the findings offer practical implications for hospitality managers by highlighting the importance of fostering employee engagement as a strategy for enhancing service quality and improving overall customer satisfaction.

1.1.Literature Review

1.1.1. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has become a prominent concept in organizational behavior and human resource management research. The concept was initially introduced by Kahn, who defined engagement as the degree to which employees express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance [6]. According to this perspective, engaged employees bring their full selves to their work roles, demonstrating enthusiasm, dedication, and energy while performing their tasks [17]. Later studies expanded this concept and identified multiple dimensions of engagement, including vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience at work, dedication reflects a strong sense of significance and enthusiasm toward work tasks, and absorption describes a state in which employees are fully concentrated and deeply involved in their work activities [9]. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model provides a theoretical explanation for the development of employee engagement. According to this model, job resources such as managerial support, autonomy, recognition, and career development opportunities contribute to higher levels of engagement among employees [8]. When employees have access to sufficient job resources, they are more likely to feel motivated and committed to their work roles. Within the hospitality industry, employee engagement is particularly important because employees frequently interact with customers and influence their service experiences. Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate proactive behavior, show empathy toward customers, and maintain positive attitudes during service encounters. These behaviors can significantly enhance the quality of customer interactions and contribute to improved service outcomes.

1.1.2. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most widely studied concepts in marketing and service management literature. It refers to the overall evaluation of a service experience based on the comparison between customer expectations and perceived performance [9]. According to expectation-confirmation theory, customers form expectations about a service before experiencing it. After the service is delivered, customers compare their perceptions of the actual performance with their prior expectations. If the perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations, customers experience satisfaction; if it falls short, dissatisfaction occurs [10]. In hospitality environments, customer satisfaction is influenced by multiple factors including service quality, employee behavior, physical facilities, and the overall atmosphere of the service environment. Because hospitality services involve high levels of personal interaction, the behavior and attitudes of employees often play a decisive role in shaping customer perceptions [11]. Customer satisfaction

is closely associated with several positive organizational outcomes. Satisfied customers are more likely to exhibit loyalty, engage in repeat purchases, and recommend the service provider to others through positive word-of-mouth communication [19]. These outcomes are particularly valuable for hospitality organizations because customer retention is often more cost-effective than acquiring new customers.

1.1.3. Service Quality in Hospitality

Service quality is another fundamental concept in hospitality management research. It refers to customers' evaluation of the overall excellence or superiority of a service [12]. One of the most widely used models for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL framework developed by Parasuraman and colleagues. This model identifies five dimensions of service quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy [13]. In hospitality settings, employees play a central role in delivering these dimensions of service quality. For instance, responsiveness and empathy are largely dependent on how employees interact with customers and respond to their needs. Employees who demonstrate attentiveness, politeness, and professionalism are more likely to create positive service experiences for customers. Numerous studies have demonstrated that higher levels of service quality lead to greater customer satisfaction. When customers perceive that a service provider

consistently delivers reliable and responsive service, they are more likely to evaluate the service positively and develop favorable attitudes toward the organization [23].

1.1.4. Relationship between Employee Engagement and Customer Satisfaction

The relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction is often explained through the service-profit chain theory. This theory proposes that internal organizational factors such as employee satisfaction, engagement, and workplace support influence service quality, which subsequently affects customer satisfaction and organizational profitability [14]. Engaged employees are more motivated to deliver exceptional service and are often willing to go beyond their formal job responsibilities to meet customer needs. Their enthusiasm and commitment can create positive emotional experiences for customers, which in turn enhance satisfaction levels.

Several empirical studies have found significant relationships between employee engagement and customer satisfaction in service industries. For example, research has shown that organizations with highly engaged employees tend to achieve higher customer satisfaction ratings and stronger customer loyalty [15–17]. However, despite the importance of this relationship, relatively few studies have specifically focused on the hospitality industry, particularly in developing economies.

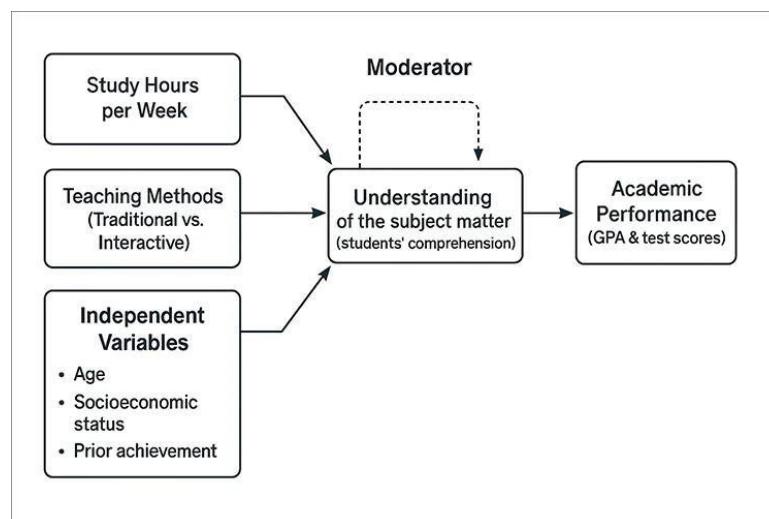


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry. Quantitative research methods are widely used in hospitality and service management studies because they allow researchers to systematically measure variables and statistically analyze relationships among them [32,33]. By using numerical data and structured instruments, quantitative approaches enable researchers to test theoretical models and validate hypotheses with a higher level of reliability and objectivity. In the context of this study, a survey-based approach was

selected as it is an effective method for collecting large amounts of data from multiple respondents and capturing perceptions related to employee engagement, service quality, and customer satisfaction [27]. The research was conducted within the hospitality sector, specifically focusing on hotels and restaurants that provide direct services to customers. These organizations were selected because they rely heavily on employee–customer interactions, making them suitable environments for examining how employee engagement affects service experiences and customer perceptions. Data were collected from two groups of respondents: employees and customers. Employees included individuals working in

service delivery roles such as front desk staff, restaurant servers, and customer service representatives [18]. Customers were individuals who had recently experienced services in the selected hospitality establishments. Collecting data from both groups allowed the study to obtain insights from the internal organizational perspective as well as the external customer perspective, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of several sections designed to measure the key constructs of the study. The first section gathered demographic information about

respondents, including gender, age, and work experience [31]. This information helped provide an overview of the sample characteristics and ensured diversity among participants. The remaining sections included measurement items related to employee engagement, service quality, and customer satisfaction. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed to employees and customers across selected hotels and restaurants. After the data collection process, 300 questionnaires were found to be complete and suitable for analysis, while the remaining responses were excluded due to missing or inconsistent information [29]. The final response rate was approximately 85 percent, which is considered satisfactory for survey-based research and indicates a high level of participant involvement.

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	54%
	Female	46%
Age	18-25	28%
	26-35	44%
	36-45	20%
	46+	8%
Experience	<2 years	32%
	2-5 years	41%
	>5 years	27%

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Employee engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), a widely recognized instrument in organizational research. The scale captures three key dimensions of engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor reflects the level of energy and mental resilience employees demonstrate while performing their tasks. Dedication refers to employees' sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride in their work. Absorption represents the extent to which employees are fully concentrated and immersed in their work activities [18]. These dimensions collectively provide a comprehensive assessment of employees' psychological involvement in their roles. Service quality was measured using selected items adapted from the SERVQUAL model, which evaluates customer perceptions of service performance across multiple dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

This model has been widely applied in hospitality research to assess service quality from the customer perspective. Customer satisfaction was measured using a standardized satisfaction scale commonly used in hospitality and service management studies [19]. All measurement items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with each statement. After data collection, statistical analysis was conducted using appropriate quantitative analysis techniques. The analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics, reliability analysis to assess the consistency of the measurement scales, and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among employee engagement, service quality, and customer satisfaction [35,36]

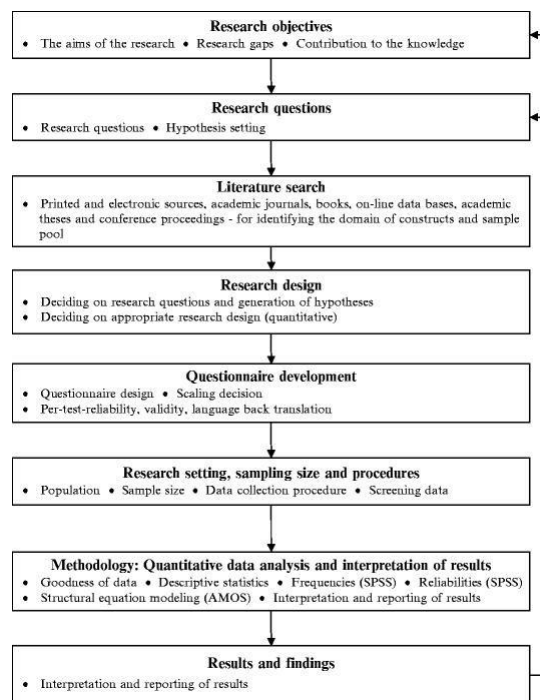


Figure 2: Research Methodology Process

3. Results

Data analysis for this study was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). These analytical techniques are widely used in hospitality and service management research because they allow researchers to evaluate complex relationships among multiple variables simultaneously and provide reliable statistical results [20]. The analysis process consisted of several stages, including descriptive statistics, reliability testing, validity assessment, and hypothesis testing through structural equation modeling. These procedures ensured that the measurement scales used in the study were statistically reliable and that the proposed research model could be empirically tested. Initially, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize the characteristics of the collected data and to provide an overview of respondents' responses to the survey items. Descriptive statistics are useful in understanding the general trends and distribution of data within the sample [37]. The results indicated that the responses were normally distributed, which satisfied the assumptions required for further statistical analysis. Previous research suggests that ensuring normal data distribution improves the accuracy and reliability of structural equation modeling results [21]. Following the descriptive analysis, reliability testing was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study.

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement instrument produces consistent results when measuring the same construct under similar conditions [22]. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the constructs, as it is one of the most widely accepted indicators of internal consistency in social science research. According to established research standards, Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability, while values above 0.80 represent good reliability [23].

The reliability results demonstrated that all constructs used in this study met the recommended threshold values. Employee engagement recorded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Similarly, service quality and customer satisfaction showed Cronbach's alpha values of 0.86 and 0.90 respectively, confirming that the measurement items were reliable indicators of their respective constructs. Composite reliability was also calculated to further evaluate the reliability of the measurement model. Composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, providing additional evidence that the measurement scales used in this study were statistically reliable and suitable for further analysis [24].

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite
Reliability		
Employee Engagement	0.89	0.91
Service Quality	0.86	0.88
Customer Satisfaction	0.90	0.92

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Results

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, structural equation modeling was applied to test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables. SEM is considered an effective statistical technique for examining causal relationships among multiple constructs and evaluating the overall fit of theoretical models [25]. The technique enables researchers to simultaneously analyze direct and indirect relationships between variables, making it particularly suitable for studies that involve mediating variables such as service quality. The results of the structural model analysis revealed several significant relationships among the variables [29]. First, employee engagement was found to have a significant positive effect on service quality. This finding indicates that employees who demonstrate higher levels of engagement are more likely to deliver higher-quality services to customers. Engaged employees typically exhibit greater enthusiasm, attentiveness, and dedication in their work roles, which positively influences the quality of service interactions [26]. Second, the results showed that service quality had a strong positive effect on customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous hospitality research, which suggests that customers evaluate their service experiences primarily

based on the quality of service they receive [27]. When customers perceive that services are reliable, responsive, and delivered with empathy, they are more likely to report higher satisfaction levels. Third, employee engagement was found to have a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction. This result suggests that employees who are emotionally and psychologically invested in their work are more likely to create positive service experiences for customers. Engaged employees tend to display positive attitudes, effective communication skills, and proactive behaviors that enhance customer perceptions and satisfaction [28]. In addition to the direct relationships, the study also examined the mediating role of service quality in the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. The results indicated that service quality partially mediates this relationship. This means that employee engagement improves customer satisfaction both directly and indirectly through enhanced service quality. These findings support the theoretical assumptions of the service-profit chain model, which emphasizes the importance of employee engagement in driving customer outcomes and organizational performance [29].

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H1	Employee Engagement Customer Satisfaction →	Supported
H2	Employee Engagement Service Quality →	Supported
H3	Service Quality Customer Satisfaction →	Supported
H4	Mediation Effect	Supported

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Overall, the results of the structural equation modeling analysis provide strong empirical support for the proposed research model. The findings confirm that employee engagement plays a significant role in improving service quality and enhancing customer satisfaction within the

hospitality industry. By demonstrating both direct and indirect relationships among these variables, the study highlights the importance of employee engagement as a key driver of customer-related outcomes.

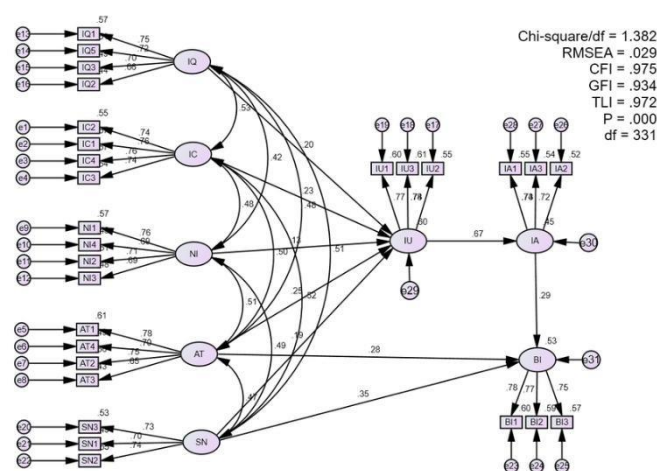


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model Results

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that employee engagement plays a crucial role in influencing customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Employees who demonstrate higher levels of engagement are more likely to provide attentive, responsive, and personalized services to customers. These behaviors contribute to improved service experiences and enhance customer perceptions of service quality. The results also support the theoretical assumptions of the service-profit chain model, which emphasizes the importance of internal organizational factors in shaping customer

outcomes. When employees feel motivated and emotionally connected to their work, they are more likely to deliver high-quality services that meet or exceed customer expectations. Furthermore, the mediating role of service quality suggests that employee engagement influences customer satisfaction not only directly but also indirectly through improvements in service performance. This finding highlights the importance of focusing on both employee engagement and service quality as complementary strategies for enhancing customer satisfaction.

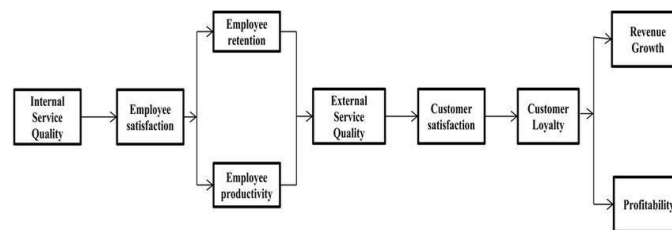


Figure 4: Service-Profit Chain Relationship

4.1. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide several important implications for hospitality managers. First, organizations should recognize that employee engagement is a key driver of service performance and customer satisfaction. Investing in employee engagement initiatives can therefore lead to improved customer experiences and stronger organizational performance. Second, hospitality organizations should focus on creating supportive work environments that encourage employees to actively participate in service delivery. Providing opportunities for training, professional development, and recognition can enhance employees' sense of commitment and motivation. Finally, managers should ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to deliver highquality services. By fostering a culture that values employee engagement and service excellence, hospitality organizations can improve their competitive advantage in the marketplace.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry. The results indicate that employee engagement significantly influences service quality and customer satisfaction. Service quality also mediates the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of employee behavior in shaping customer experiences. The findings contribute to hospitality management literature by providing empirical evidence of the link between employee engagement and customer outcomes. The study also offers practical insights for hospitality managers seeking to improve service performance and customer satisfaction through employee focused strategies.

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