

Analysis of the Mediating Role of Service Quality on the Influence of Employee Communication Competence and Price on Customer Satisfaction

Ivan Dwi Septiyan^{1*}, Rifky Ardhana Kisno Saputra², Ariefah Sundari³

¹⁻³Faculty of Economics and Business, Darul Ulum Islamic University, Lamongan, Indonesia

Corresponding Author's e-mail : rm.ivan.2022@mhs.unisda.ac.id

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Abstract : The existence of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), particularly in the coffee shop sector, is significantly influenced by customer satisfaction levels. This research aims to analyze the influence of employee communication competence and price on customer satisfaction, with service quality as a mediating variable at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad in Tuban Regency. The study adopts a quantitative associative methodology. Data are collected through structured questionnaires distributed to customers using accidental sampling techniques. The data analysis is performed using Path Analysis to examine both direct and indirect effects within the research model. The findings indicate that employee communication competence and price significantly influence service quality. Furthermore, service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and serves as a vital mediator that links communication competence and price to overall satisfaction levels. In conclusion, to enhance customer satisfaction, SMEs must prioritize improving communication skills among staff and maintaining competitive pricing policies, both of which are manifested through superior service quality.

Keywords: Communication Competence, Price, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, SMEs.

Abstrak : Eksistensi Usaha Mikro Kecil dan Menengah (UMKM), khususnya pada sektor warung kopi, sangat dipengaruhi oleh tingkat kepuasan pelanggan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kompetensi komunikasi karyawan dan harga terhadap kepuasan pelanggan, dengan kualitas pelayanan sebagai variabel mediasi pada Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad di Kabupaten Tuban. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi kuantitatif asosiatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang didistribusikan kepada pelanggan menggunakan teknik accidental sampling. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Path Analysis untuk menguji efek langsung maupun tidak langsung dalam model penelitian. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi komunikasi karyawan dan harga berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kualitas pelayanan. Selain itu, kualitas pelayanan memiliki dampak signifikan terhadap kepuasan pelanggan dan berfungsi sebagai mediator vital yang menghubungkan kompetensi komunikasi serta harga terhadap tingkat kepuasan secara keseluruhan. Kesimpulannya, untuk meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan, pelaku UMKM harus memprioritaskan peningkatan keterampilan

komunikasi staf dan menjaga kebijakan harga yang kompetitif, yang keduanya diwujudkan melalui kualitas pelayanan yang unggul.

Kata Kunci: *Kompetensi Komunikasi, Harga, Kualitas Layanan, Kepuasan Pelanggan, UKM*

INTRODUCTION

Business competition in the culinary sector, particularly coffee shops in Tuban Regency, has shown a significant upward trend in recent years. This phenomenon compels Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), such as Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad, to continuously adapt in order to maintain their market share. Customer satisfaction has become a primary indicator of business success as it is closely related to repurchase intention and consumer loyalty. However, in practice, maintaining customer satisfaction is not an easy task, considering that consumer expectations continue to evolve regarding the value they receive from a service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

The primary challenge often faced by local MSMEs is the limitation in effectively integrating interpersonal factors and value policies. Based on the literature review, employee communication competence plays a crucial role in minimizing service failures and building customer trust (Spitzberg & Cupan, 2002). On the other hand, the prices set by service providers often serve as a primary consideration for consumers before determining their level of satisfaction. Although previous research indicates a relationship between these variables, a research gap exists where the influence of communication competence and price often does not impact customer satisfaction directly; instead, it requires a more technical intervening variable, namely service quality (Tjiptono, 2015). This research gap underlies the necessity of testing a mediation model within the context of traditional coffee shops in Tuban.

Service quality, which encompasses dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, is positioned as a mediating variable because it is considered capable of strengthening positive customer perceptions of both employee communication and the pricing policies implemented (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Without standardized service quality, neither good communication nor low prices may be sufficient to generate maximum customer satisfaction at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad. The objective of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the influence of employee communication competence and price on customer satisfaction through service quality as a mediating variable. This study is expected to contribute new theoretical insights to the development of MSME marketing management. Practically, this research provides strategic recommendations for the owner of Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad and similar MSME practitioners in Tuban Regency to optimize employee performance and pricing strategies through enhanced service quality to achieve optimal customer satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with an associative survey design to examine the effect of employee communication competence and price on customer satisfaction, with service quality as a mediating variable. The research was conducted at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad, Tuban Regency. The population consisted of all customers of Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad. Since the exact population size was unknown, the sample was set at 100 respondents. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. Respondents were selected based on two criteria: they were at least 17 years old and had visited Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad at least twice. These criteria ensured that respondents had sufficient experience to assess communication competence, price, service quality, and customer satisfaction.

Primary data were collected through a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. Employee communication competence was measured based on interpersonal communication effectiveness (Spitzberg & Cupan, 2002), price was measured through affordability and competitiveness indicators (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018), service quality was measured using the SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988), and customer satisfaction was measured based on expectation confirmation (Oliver, 2014). Data were analyzed using IBM

SPSS through descriptive analysis, validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests, path analysis, and the Sobel test. Path analysis was used to examine direct and indirect effects among variables, while the Sobel test was used to confirm the mediating role of service quality in the relationship between employee communication competence, price, and customer satisfaction.

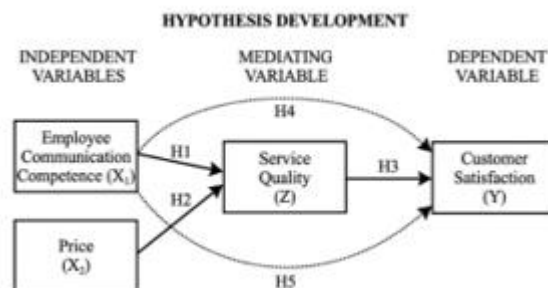


Figure 1. Hypothesis Development

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Feasibility Test

Before conducting the hypothesis testing, the researcher first performed a series of feasibility tests on the research instruments to ensure that the data obtained possessed a level of accuracy and consistency that can be scientifically justified. This testing included two main stages: the verification of item accuracy (validity test) and the evaluation of the consistency of the measuring tool (reliability test) conducted on the 100 respondents who completed the questionnaires. The validity test was conducted by comparing the correlation value of each item (r -calculated) with the critical value in the distribution table (r -table) of 0.196 at a 5% significance level. Based on the data processing results, all indicators in this study are declared valid because they have correlation values that far exceed the minimum required threshold. The details of the validity test results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Instrument Validity Test Results

Research Variables	Statement Items	r Calculated	r Table	Description
Communication Competence (X1)	X1.1	0.762	0.196	Valid
	X1.2	0.815	0.196	Valid
	X1.3	0.698	0.196	Valid
	X1.4	0.741	0.196	Valid
Price (X2)	X2.1	0.802	0.196	Valid
	X2.2	0.729	0.196	Valid
	X2.3	0.854	0.196	Valid
Service Quality (Z)	Z1	0.714	0.196	Valid
	Z2	0.682	0.196	Valid
	Z3	0.793	0.196	Valid
	Z4	0.822	0.196	Valid
Customer Satisfaction (Y)	Y1	0.788	0.196	Valid
	Y2	0.756	0.196	Valid
	Y3	0.831	0.196	Valid

After all statement items were declared valid, the next step was to conduct a reliability test to measure the stability of the questionnaire if used repeatedly. The parameter used is the Cronbach's Alpha value with a feasibility criterion above 0.60. The analysis results show that all variables have very good coefficients, as summarized in the following table 2 of internal consistency testing (Reliability) results:

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Research Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Description
Communication Competence (X1)	0.845	Reliable
Price (X2)	0.792	Reliable
Service Quality (Z)	0.861	Reliable
Customer Satisfaction (Y)	0.828	Reliable

Overall, the findings in Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that the research instruments distributed to Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad customers have met the required validity and reliability criteria. The correlation value of each statement item is higher than the *r*-table value of 0.196, which means that all items are valid. In addition, all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60, indicating that the instruments have acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, all questionnaire items are considered feasible and reliable for measuring the research variables and can be used in the next stage of statistical analysis.

Classical Assumption Test

The application of classical assumption tests is a primary prerequisite in this research model to ensure that the estimated regression parameters are objective and unbiased, thereby fulfilling the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE) criteria. The first step was conducted through a normality test, which aims to verify whether the confounding variables or residuals in the regression model follow a normal distribution. Data abnormality can cause statistical test results to be invalid, particularly in parameter significance testing. Based on the statistical test results using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, a significance value of 0.200 was obtained, which is significantly above the 0.05 threshold. This finding is reinforced by visual observation of the Normal Probability Plot, where the data points consistently follow the direction of the diagonal line and do not show extreme deviations, thus declaring the model has perfectly met the normality assumption.

Detection of whether or not there is an excessively strong correlation between the independent variables was conducted through a multicollinearity test on the variables Communication Competence (X₁) and Price (X₂). The presence of multicollinearity in a research model can cause the standard error of the regression coefficients to become very large, making it difficult to determine which independent variable truly has a dominant influence on customer satisfaction. A healthy regression model requires these variables to not have perfect linear correlation so that the predictive value of each variable can be measured accurately and independently. The results of the statistical analysis, referring to the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) parameters, are summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Results of the Multicollinearity Test

Independent Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Communication Competence (X ₁)	0,812	1,231	Free from Multicollinearity
Price (X ₂)	0,812	1,231	Free from Multicollinearity

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the tolerance values for Communication Competence (X₁) and Price (X₂) are 0.812, which are above the minimum threshold of 0.10. The VIF values are 1.231, which are below the maximum threshold of 10. These results indicate that the regression model is free from multicollinearity. Therefore, Communication Competence and Price can be used as independent variables because they do not show excessive correlation with each other.

The next classical assumption test is the heteroscedasticity test. This test aims to determine whether the residual variance differs across observations in the regression model. A good regression model should meet the homoscedasticity assumption, meaning that the residual variance remains constant. Heteroscedasticity was examined using a scatterplot and the Glejser test. The scatterplot showed that the points were randomly distributed and did not form a specific

pattern. In addition, the Glejser test was conducted by regressing the absolute residual values on Communication Competence (X1) and Price (X2). The results of the heteroscedasticity test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Heteroscedasticity Test Results Using the Glejser Test

Independent Variable	Significance Value	Description
Communication Competence (X1)	0.642	Free from Heteroscedasticity
Price (X2)	0.418	Free from Heteroscedasticity

Based on Table 4, the significance values of Communication Competence (X1) and Price (X2) are 0.642 and 0.418, respectively. Both values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the independent variables do not significantly affect the absolute residual values. Therefore, the regression model is free from heteroscedasticity and meets the homoscedasticity assumption. This means that the model is suitable for further regression and hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing in this study is conducted by observing the significance values and path coefficients generated from the regression model. The path coefficient for the influence of Communication Competence (X₁) on Service Quality (Z) is recorded at 0.428 with a significance value of 0.000. Since this significance value is well below the 0.05 threshold, the first hypothesis (H₁) is declared accepted. This finding indicates that the communication skills possessed by the staff at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad have a significant and positive impact on improving the perception of service quality in the eyes of customers.

Testing the Price variable (X₂) against Service Quality (Z) resulted in a significance value of 0.004 with a beta coefficient of 0.356. This result, which falls below the 0.05 significance standard, provides a strong basis for accepting the second hypothesis (H₂), indicating that the implemented pricing policy directly contributes to the formation of service quality assessments. Assessments of the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable also showed similar results, where Communication Competence (X₁) and Price (X₂) on Customer Satisfaction (Y) each had significance values of 0.008 and 0.012. These figures prove that the third hypothesis (H₃) and fourth hypothesis (H₄) are accepted, while also confirming that the satisfaction of visitors at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad is significantly determined by the quality of staff interaction and the economic value of the products. Analysis of the final path shows that Service Quality (Z) has a very dominant influence on Customer Satisfaction (Y) with a significance value of 0.000 and a path coefficient of 0.489. This condition leads to the fifth hypothesis (H₅) being declared accepted and strengthens the theory that service excellence is the primary key to creating customer satisfaction. All hypothesis testing results, including the significance parameters for each variable relationship path, are comprehensively summarized in the following Table 5 Research Hypothesis Testing Results:

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	Coefficient	Sig. Value	Conclusion
H ₁	X ₁ →Z	0,428	0,000	Significant
H ₂	X ₂ →Z	0,356	0,004	Significant
H ₃	X ₁ →Y	0,312	0,008	Significant
H ₄	X ₂ →Y	0,284	0,012	Significant
H ₅	Z→Y	0,489	0,000	Significant

The fulfillment of all significance criteria in Table 6 provides empirical evidence that the model proposed in the research at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad has high validity. These results allow for the conclusion to be drawn that each element studied plays a strategic role in driving the creation of a comprehensive customer satisfaction ecosystem. The Influence of Communication Competence on Service Quality.

Based on the results of the data analysis, the Communication Competence variable (X_1) is proven to have a positive and significant influence on Service Quality (Z) at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad. This is evidenced by a significance value of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05, and a path coefficient of 0.428. These findings indicate that the better the communication skills possessed by the staff, such as friendliness in greeting and clarity in explaining the menu, the more the customer perception of service quality standards will increase. Effective communication is the key to minimizing order misunderstandings and building a good emotional connection with visitors.

The Effect of Communication Competence on Service Quality

The results show that Communication Competence (X_1) has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality (Z), with a coefficient of 0.428 and a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is below 0.05, H_1 is accepted. This finding indicates that better employee communication competence improves customer perceptions of service quality at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad. Employees who communicate clearly, politely, and responsively can reduce misunderstanding, improve customer comfort, and create a more positive service experience.

This result supports the view that interpersonal communication is an essential element in service encounters. Communication competence enables employees to understand customer needs, provide clear information, and build trust during the service process. Previous studies also explain that effective communication strengthens customer perceptions of service quality because customers evaluate service not only from the product received, but also from the way employees interact with them (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002; DeVito, 2019).

The Effect of Price on Service Quality

The results show that Price (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on Service Quality (Z), with a coefficient of 0.356 and a significance value of 0.004. Since the significance value is below 0.05, H_2 is accepted. This means that customers who perceive the price as affordable, fair, and appropriate to the benefits received tend to assess the service quality more positively.

This finding indicates that price is not only viewed as a cost, but also as a signal of value. When customers feel that the price is consistent with the product, facilities, atmosphere, and service received, they are more likely to perceive the service as good. This finding is in line with marketing theory, which states that price fairness and value suitability influence customer evaluation of service performance (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Tjiptono, 2015).

The Effect of Communication Competence on Customer Satisfaction

The results show that Communication Competence (X_1) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction (Y), with a coefficient of 0.312 and a significance value of 0.008. Since the significance value is below 0.05, H_3 is accepted. This finding indicates that employee communication competence directly contributes to customer satisfaction. Friendly greetings, clear menu explanations, and responsive communication can create a comfortable experience for customers.

This result confirms that customer satisfaction in a coffee shop is not only determined by the taste of the product, but also by the quality of interaction between customers and employees. Customers tend to feel more satisfied when employees are able to communicate politely, listen to their needs, and respond to questions or complaints effectively. This finding is consistent with service marketing studies which emphasize that interpersonal interaction is a key factor in shaping customer satisfaction in service-based businesses (Oliver, 2014; DeVito, 2019).

The Effect of Price on Customer Satisfaction

The results show that Price (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction (Y), with a coefficient of 0.284 and a significance value of 0.012. Since the significance value is below 0.05, H_4 is accepted. This finding indicates that fair and affordable pricing can increase customer satisfaction at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad. Customers feel satisfied when the price paid is proportional to the product quality, service, and atmosphere received.

This result supports the concept that price fairness is an important determinant of customer satisfaction. Customers usually compare the amount paid with the value received. If the perceived value is equal to or higher than the cost incurred, satisfaction will increase. This finding is consistent with previous marketing literature which explains that price suitability, affordability,

and perceived value influence customer satisfaction and repeat purchase intention (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Tjiptono, 2015).

The Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The results show that Service Quality (Z) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction (Y), with a coefficient of 0.489 and a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value is below 0.05, H5 is accepted. This coefficient is the highest among all direct relationships, indicating that service quality is the most dominant factor influencing customer satisfaction in this model.

This finding shows that customer satisfaction is strongly shaped by tangible facilities, service reliability, employee responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Fast service, cleanliness, accuracy in serving orders, and employee attention are important elements that make customers feel satisfied. This result is consistent with the SERVQUAL model, which states that service quality is formed through tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, and these dimensions influence customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In addition, customer satisfaction theory explains that satisfaction occurs when the service received meets or exceeds customer expectations (Oliver, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of the data analysis, this study concludes that customer satisfaction at Warung Kopi Sekar Jagad is influenced by employee communication competence, price, and service quality. Employee communication competence helps shape positive customer perceptions through clear, polite, and responsive interaction. Price also contributes to satisfaction when customers perceive it as fair and proportional to the value received. Service quality plays a central role because it strengthens the effect of communication competence and price on customer satisfaction. Thus, the objective of this study has been achieved by confirming that service quality serves as an important mediating variable in explaining customer satisfaction.

Future research is recommended to expand the study area and involve more coffee shops or culinary MSMEs to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers may also add variables such as physical evidence, brand image, customer loyalty, digital promotion, or store atmosphere to develop a more comprehensive model. For practitioners, coffee shop owners should improve employee communication skills, maintain transparent pricing, and standardize service quality to strengthen customer satisfaction. From a policy perspective, local governments and MSME development agencies should provide training programs on service excellence, pricing strategy, and customer relationship management to support the competitiveness of culinary MSMEs.

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