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The Effect of Employee Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction Mediated by Price At the A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop MSME in Palembang City

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the effect of employee service quality on customer satisfaction, mediated by price, at UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop in Palembang. As consumer expectations shift toward customization, consultative selling becomes crucial. A quantitative method with a purposive sampling of 100 respondents was employed. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS 4.0. The results indicate that service quality significantly affects price perceptions and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, price significantly influences customer satisfaction and partially mediates the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Effectively implementing consultative selling justifies pricing and enhances overall satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the business environment requires every business actor, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), to optimally utilize their resources in formulating competitive marketing strategies. One MSME sector with significant potential is the manufacturing and interior construction services industry, specifically aluminum and glass furniture workshops (Oktafiani, 2021). The dynamic competition in the aluminum and glass furniture industry in Palembang City shows a substantial shift in consumer behavior. Consumers no longer merely seek raw materials; they now demand highly customized interior design solutions. This shift requires MSME actors to transform from traditional material sellers into design and installation consulting service providers. Consequently, employee interaction and consultative roles become highly crucial. Service quality is currently measured not only by friendliness but also by employees' hard skills in technical precision and soft skills in educative communication (Parinussa, 2024).

This phenomenon is evident at UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop in Palembang City. High demand for customization entails a complex service process that frequently triggers operational constraints and customer complaints. Technical issues, such as chipped glass or scratched aluminum due to human error, indicate a gap in service reliability. Consistent employee service quality, especially in minimizing technical errors and providing product education, is a major predictor in shaping customer satisfaction (Abbas, 2023). Furthermore, since customized products lack a standard market price, pricing plays a critical mediating role. When employees apply an educative service approach, customers perceive the offered price as rational and fair (Solihin & Kurniawan, 2024). This study provides a novel contribution to MSME marketing literature by empirically testing a structural mediation model within a local fabrication service business using the Expectation Confirmation Theory approach. The primary objectives of this research are to determine and analyze the effect of employee service quality on price perception, the effect of employee service quality on customer satisfaction, the effect of price on customer satisfaction, and the mediating role of price in the relationship between employee service quality and customer satisfaction at UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop in Palembang City.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT)

The grand theory utilized as the conceptual foundation for this research is the Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) developed by Oliver (1980). ECT postulates that satisfaction is an affective stage resulting from a cognitive evaluation process where consumers compare their initial pre-purchase expectations with their perception of the actual performance of the received product or service. In this research, employee service quality represents the actual performance of the service provider. When the perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations, positive confirmation occurs, leading to satisfaction (Suharyono, 2023).

Employee Service Quality

Service quality is a concept that illustrates a service provider's ability to deliver valuable services that meet or even exceed customer expectations. According to Tjiptono & Chandra (2021), service quality reflects the level of service excellence expected by consumers and the company's capability to consistently realize that standard. In the interior customization industry, service quality is not solely determined by the final physical product, but is heavily influenced by the interaction quality between employees and customers during the service encounter. Kurniawan (2022) highlights that employees' problem-solving capabilities play a major role in building customer loyalty. Specifically, excellent service is manifested through a consultative selling approach, where employees act as active technical advisors bridging the customers' aesthetic desires with technical realities in the field (Abbas, 2023). This variable is comprehensively measured through five main dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

Price

In the marketing mix, price is a crucial element that directly contributes to the company's revenue and serves as an indicator of value. Kotler et al. (2022) define price as the sum of values customers exchange for the benefits of having or using a product or service. In this structural model, price is strategically positioned as a mediating variable, reflecting the "perceived value" formed after consumers experience a certain level of service quality. Firmansyah (2024) asserts that pricing is not merely an administrative process but a strategic decision acting as a powerful communication tool to position product value. In the MSME customization sector, pricing is highly complex and fluctuates based on design intricacies, material volume, and installation difficulty. Therefore, transparent pricing combined with consultative service creates a strong sense of price fairness, where customers perceive the cost as rational and proportional to the precision and quality received (Solihin & Kurniawan, 2024).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the ultimate operational and marketing goal for any business entity. Suharyono (2023) explains that customer satisfaction is a positive emotional response that arises when consumers compare their pre-purchase expectations with the actual performance they experience. In the interior construction sector, this satisfaction is evaluated based on the entire transaction experience, ranging from the initial consultation and price transparency to the final installation process free of human errors (Abbas, 2023). The creation of customer satisfaction is driven by a holistic value package, which includes physical product durability, responsive employee interaction, and a fair economic exchange (Cahyani et al., 2024). Consequently, highly satisfied customers are more likely to exhibit positive post-purchase behaviors, such as exhibiting strong repurchase intentions and a willingness to recommend the services through word-of-mouth.

Based on the theoretical foundation and the relationships between variables, the proposed hypotheses for this study are:
H1: Employee Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Price.
H2: Price has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction.
H3: Employee Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction.
H4: Employee Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Customer Satisfaction through Price as a mediating variable.

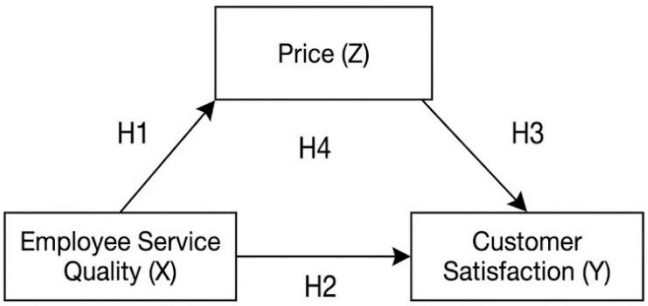

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design with an associative causal approach to examine the relationships among variables. The population consists of all customers who have ordered custom interior products and installation services at UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop in Palembang City. Given that the exact total number of customers is unknown (unknown population), a purposive sampling technique was utilized. The sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula, resulting in 100 respondents who met the inclusion criteria of having directly interacted with the employees during the consultation and installation process.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), complemented by direct observations and preliminary interviews. The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) operated via SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analysis process involved two main stages: evaluating the measurement model (Outer Model) to test for validity and reliability, and evaluating the structural model (Inner Model) to assess the coefficient of determination (R-Square), predictive relevance (Q-Square), and hypothesis testing through the bootstrapping procedure.

RESEARCH RESULT

Respondent Characteristics and Descriptive Analysis

The demographic profile of the 100 respondents indicates a relatively balanced distribution, with males constituting 53% and females 47%. This balanced proportion highlights that both genders are actively involved in determining interior customization decisions. Regarding the types of products ordered, aluminum windows and doors were the most frequently requested (64%), followed by kitchen sets (46%), and glass partitions (38%). The descriptive statistical analysis reveals the overall performance of each variable. The Employee Service Quality variable achieved a high average index of 3.83, with the Tangibles dimension scoring the highest (3.88) due to the neat appearance of the staff, and Empathy scoring the lowest (3.72), indicating a slight need for improvement in personal attention. The Price variable scored an average of 3.90, where the indicator for "value for money" recorded the highest score (4.06), showing that customers strongly feel the benefits align with the costs. Meanwhile, Customer Satisfaction obtained an average index of 3.30, categorizing it as neutral-to-good, with the most positive response centering on the overall pleasant transaction experience.

Measurement Model (Outer Model) Evaluation

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted to ensure that all indicators used accurately and consistently measure their respective latent variables. The convergent validity testing demonstrated that all indicators representing Service Quality, Price, and Customer Satisfaction successfully exceeded the critical threshold of an Outer Loading greater than 0.70. Specifically, the loading values ranged from 0.713 to 0.855, which confirmed that no items needed to be eliminated from the proposed model. Following this, the discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The correlation ratios between constructs were 0.809 for Service Quality and Price, 0.824 for Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction, and 0.768 for Price and Customer Satisfaction. All these values were well below the 0.90 threshold, confirming that each construct is empirically distinct. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the model was highly satisfactory, as shown in Table 1. All variables surpassed the minimum criteria for construct reliability, achieving a Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability greater than 0.70, as well as an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above the 0.50 mark.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Latent Variable	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Composite Reliability**	**AVE**	**Result**
Service Quality (X)	0.933	0.943	0.625	Reliable & Valid
Price (Z)	0.796	0.867	0.621	Reliable & Valid
Customer Satisfaction (Y)	0.822	0.883	0.653	Reliable & Valid

Structural Model (Inner Model) Evaluation

After satisfying the outer model requirements, the structural model evaluation was performed to assess the predictive capabilities and causality relationships within the model. The coefficient of determination (R-Square) analysis revealed that the Price variable obtained a value of 0.499. This indicates a moderate predictive power where 49.9% of the variance in Price perception is explained by Service Quality. Similarly, the R-Square for Customer Satisfaction reached 0.549, meaning that 54.9% of its variance is jointly explained by Service Quality and Price. In addition to the R-Square, the effect size (F-Square) evaluation highlighted the substantial impact of the independent variables. Service Quality demonstrated a large effect size on Price (0.994) and a large effect size on Customer Satisfaction (0.350), whereas Price exhibited a small effect size on Customer Satisfaction (0.058). Finally, the predictive relevance of the model was confirmed through the Q-Square values. Both Price (0.339) and Customer Satisfaction (0.399) yielded values greater than zero, confirming that the structural model possesses robust predictive relevance for real-world observations.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing phase was executed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples in SmartPLS 4.0. A hypothesis is considered supported if the T-statistics value exceeds 1.96 and the P-value is less than 0.05. The results of the direct effect analysis indicate that the first hypothesis (H1) is supported, with an Original Sample of 0.706, a T-statistic of 16.267, and a P-value of 0.000. This proves that excellent service quality significantly enhances the customers' perception that the pricing is fair and rational. The second hypothesis (H2) is also supported, showing an Original Sample of 0.229, a T-statistic of 2.726, and a P-value of 0.006, which means that transparent and competitive pricing directly contributes to higher customer satisfaction. For the third hypothesis (H3), the analysis yielded an Original Sample of 0.561, a T-statistic of 6.827, and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, H3 is supported, indicating that service quality is the strongest direct contributor to customer satisfaction. Lastly, the specific indirect effect analysis was conducted to test the fourth hypothesis (H4). The indirect pathway of Service Quality affecting Customer Satisfaction through Price yielded an Original Sample of 0.162, a T-statistic of 2.650, and a P-value of 0.008. Since both the indirect effect and the direct effect are significant, Price is proven to act as a partial mediator. This finding confirms that service quality simultaneously satisfies customers directly and builds a positive price perception that further amplifies their overall satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Service Quality on Price

Based on the results of the first hypothesis test (H1), a *T-Statistic* value of 16.267 and a *P-Value* of 0.000 were obtained. The *T-Statistic*, which substantially exceeds the critical value of 1.96, along with a *P-Value* below the 0.05 significance level, demonstrates that Service Quality has a positive and statistically significant effect on Price. The path coefficient (*Original Sample*) of 0.706 further indicates a

positive direction of the relationship between the two variables. This finding implies that improvements in the quality and effectiveness of services provided by employees significantly enhance customers' perceptions of the fairness and appropriateness of the prices charged.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding is consistent with the modern marketing perspective, which positions service quality as one of the key antecedents in shaping favorable price perceptions among consumers. Tjiptono and Chandra (2022) argue that contemporary customers do not evaluate prices solely based on the monetary amount they are required to pay; rather, they assess prices in relation to the overall benefits and experiences obtained throughout the transaction process. When a business is able to provide responsive, reliable, and empathetic services, customers' price sensitivity tends to decrease. Customers are more likely to perceive the costs incurred as commensurate with the additional value (*value added*) derived from the convenience and service assurance they receive (Kotler et al., 2021).

In the practical context of A2 Aluminum and Glass Store, the statistical findings are highly relevant to the conditions observed in the field. Products such as display cases, aluminum windows, and glass installations are generally customized (*custom-made*), making interactions between employees and customers particularly important. The transaction process involves more than simply exchanging goods; it encompasses a range of technical services, including design consultation, precise on-site measurements, and the fabrication and installation of the products.

When employees demonstrate prompt responsiveness, such as arriving on time for site surveys, possess sufficient technical competence to ensure precise and well-finished fabrication, and provide assurance regarding the quality of their work, customers are more likely to perceive the prices charged by the store as fair and reasonable. Professional and courteous employee performance, accompanied by efforts to minimize workmanship errors and achieve *zero-defect* outcomes, can strengthen customers' sense of security and confidence. This trust and perceived assurance ultimately shift customers' focus away from simply seeking the lowest possible price toward appreciating the value embedded in the service provided. Consequently, customers are more likely to accept and evaluate the prices offered by the store positively (Abbas, 2022).

The Effect of Price on Customer Satisfaction

Based on the results of the second hypothesis test (H2), the analysis produced a *T-Statistic* value of 2.726 and a *P-Value* of 0.006. The *T-Statistic* exceeds the critical value of 1.96, while the *P-Value* is below the 0.05 significance level. These results confirm that Price has a positive and statistically significant effect on Customer Satisfaction. The path coefficient (*Original Sample*) of 0.229 indicates that the relationship between the two variables is positive. This finding suggests that customers' satisfaction tends to increase when the prices offered by the store are perceived as competitive, affordable, and reasonable.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding is consistent with consumer behavior theory, which views price as a multidimensional attribute used by

consumers to evaluate an offering both before and after purchase. Kotler et al. (2021) explain that price does not merely represent the monetary sacrifice required from consumers but also serves as an important indicator of the perceived quality and value of a product. Customers are likely to experience a higher level of satisfaction when they perceive a fair balance between the monetary costs incurred and the physical and psychological benefits obtained from the product (Sudaryono, 2022). When customers believe that they have received adequate benefits without being financially disadvantaged, a sense of satisfaction is more likely to emerge naturally.

In the practical context of A2 Aluminum and Glass Store, the significant effect of Price on Customer Satisfaction is clearly reflected in market behavior. The aluminum and glass fabrication industry is characterized by relatively intense competition, allowing customers to compare prices per meter or overall project costs across different workshops and stores. Consequently, price transparency and the alignment between the price charged and the specifications of the materials used represent important determinants of customer satisfaction (Ardiyanto, 2022).

For instance, when customers order customized products such as shop display cases, dish racks, or aluminum frames, they generally expect the agreed-upon final price to cover the entire cost of the project without unexpected additional charges or *hidden costs* upon completion. A reasonable and competitive price that corresponds to the thickness and specifications of the aluminum or glass materials used can reduce the likelihood of *cognitive dissonance*, particularly post-purchase regret. Customers who perceive that they have received a fair and transparent price in accordance with the specifications of the product are more likely to experience a high level of satisfaction. In turn, this satisfaction may contribute to the development of customer loyalty and favorable *word-of-mouth* recommendations, which can support the long-term sustainability of A2 Aluminum and Glass Store as an MSME.

The Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

Based on the results of the third hypothesis test (H3), the analysis yielded a *T-Statistic* value of 6.827 and a *P-Value* of 0.000. The *T-Statistic* substantially exceeds the critical value of 1.96, while the *P-Value* is below the 0.05 significance level. These results demonstrate that Service Quality has a direct, positive, and highly significant effect on Customer Satisfaction. The path coefficient (*Original Sample*) of 0.561 indicates that Service Quality is the strongest predictor, making the most dominant direct contribution to Customer Satisfaction compared with the other variables examined in the model. This finding suggests that higher levels of service reliability, accuracy, and friendliness are associated with greater customer satisfaction (Hair et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding is highly consistent with the service management and marketing literature, which positions service quality as a fundamental determinant of business success in retaining customers. Tjiptono and Chandra (2022) describe customer satisfaction as a post-consumption evaluative response that emerges when the service experience perceived by customers (*perceived service*) meets or exceeds their initial expectations (*expected*

service). When a business is able to deliver superior service across the dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, customers are more likely to develop favorable perceptions of the value they receive, which ultimately contributes to a stronger sense of satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2021).

In the operational context of A2 Aluminum and Glass Store, the strong significance of this relationship can be understood from the characteristics of the products and services offered. Products such as aluminum frames, glass doors, and room partitions require a high degree of precision throughout the entire production and installation process, beginning with on-site measurements at the customer's premises, followed by cutting and fabrication at the workshop, and culminating in final installation at the project location. Therefore, customers evaluate not only the quality of the finished product but also the quality of their interactions with the business throughout the entire service process, from the initial consultation onward.

When the staff and technical personnel at A2 Aluminum and Glass Store communicate effectively, provide appropriate and practical design solutions, arrive according to the agreed installation schedule, and maintain the cleanliness and orderliness of the work area after installation, customers are more likely to feel secure and valued. Such proactive and solution-oriented service can reduce customers' concerns regarding potential technical errors and installation risks. Customer satisfaction is therefore generated not merely by the successful installation of the glass or aluminum product, but also by the professional, courteous, and satisfactory service experience provided throughout the entire transaction, from the initial consultation to the completion of the project.

The Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction through Price

Based on the results of the fourth hypothesis test (H4), which examines the *Specific Indirect Effects*, a *T-Statistic* value of 2.650 and a *P-Value* of 0.008 were obtained. The *T-Statistic* exceeds the critical value of 1.96, while the *P-Value* is below the 0.05 significance level. These findings provide empirical evidence that Price significantly mediates the effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction. Since the direct effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction is also statistically significant, the mediation mechanism can be classified as partial mediation (*partial mediation*) (Hair et al., 2021). This indicates that Service Quality influences Customer Satisfaction not only through a direct pathway but also through an indirect pathway by shaping favorable price perceptions, which subsequently contribute to an overall increase in customer satisfaction.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding reinforces the fundamental principles of holistic marketing management. Kotler et al. (2021) explain that consumers engage in a cognitive evaluation process when assessing a transaction, in which service quality functions as a primary input, price serves as an evaluative filter or mediating mechanism, and satisfaction represents the resulting outcome. Superior service can enhance customers' perceived value of an offering and, consequently, reduce their sensitivity to price. When customers perceive the price they pay as reasonable and proportionate to the quality of the

interaction and service received, their overall satisfaction is more likely to increase (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2022).

In the practical context of A2 Aluminum and Glass Store, this mediation mechanism can be observed in the store's daily transaction processes. Customized products, such as room partitions and display cases, often require a substantial financial investment, making customers particularly cautious when making purchasing decisions. However, when store employees provide high-quality technical services, ranging from timely site surveys and consultations that offer appropriate aesthetic solutions to precise and well-organized installation, customers' attention may shift from simply considering "how much they have to pay" toward evaluating "whether the results are worth the cost."

This high level of service plays an important role in convincing customers that the price offered or the overall project cost charged by the store is reasonable and fair. Favorable price perceptions subsequently function as a catalyst that strengthens the customer's overall sense of satisfaction. Ultimately, customers are satisfied not only because they receive a high-quality product, but also because they perceive that they have made an appropriate financial decision by obtaining a satisfactory level of service at a price they consider commensurate with the value received.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical analysis and hypothesis testing conducted in this study, several primary conclusions can be drawn. First, employee service quality implemented at UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop is proven to significantly enhance the customers' perception of price rationality and fairness. When employees deliver reliable, responsive, and consultative services, customers perceive the offered pricing as reasonable and proportional to the value received. Second, transparent and competitive pricing directly contributes to higher customer satisfaction by minimizing perceived financial risks and eliminating hidden costs. Third, employee service quality acts as the most dominant direct predictor in driving customer satisfaction, highlighting the essential role of professional technical interactions during custom interior projects. Finally, price successfully functions as a partial mediating variable, meaning that excellent service quality not only fosters direct customer satisfaction but also strengthens positive price perceptions, which in turn provides an additional pathway to amplify overall customer satisfaction.

In light of these findings, several practical recommendations are proposed for the management of UMKM Toko Aluminium dan Kaca A2. Management should continuously maintain and optimize frontline service quality, particularly by enhancing technical precision during installation, boosting staff responsiveness, and preserving transparent cost breakdowns during the initial consultation stage. Ensuring that customers fully understand the specifications of materials, such as glass thickness and aluminum types, will solidify positive price perceptions and reinforce trust. By consistently delivering high standards of consultative service alongside fair pricing, the enterprise can successfully

cultivate long-term customer satisfaction, which naturally encourages repeat orders and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Despite providing valuable theoretical and practical insights, this study contains several limitations that should be addressed in future research. The scope of this research is exclusively focused on a single micro enterprise, namely UMKM A2 Aluminum and Glass Shop in Palembang City, utilizing a cross-sectional design that captures data at a single point in time. Consequently, the findings cannot be fully generalized to other manufacturing or service sectors with different business characteristics, nor do they capture the long-term evolution of customer loyalty over time.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand upon this model by incorporating additional variables that potentially influence customer satisfaction and loyalty, such as physical product quality, brand image, or repurchase intentions. Furthermore, expanding the sample size across multiple aluminum and glass micro-enterprises in various regions or employing a longitudinal research design would significantly enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings in future academic investigations.

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