Analysing the Role of Service Encounter Quality in Enhancing Customer Delight in Chinese Hotpot Restaurant

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Abstract

This study examines the role of service encounter quality in enhancing customer delight at Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta. Employing a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 100 customers of various prominent Chinese hotpot establishments through structured questionnaires. The analysis shows that service encounter quality has a significant positive effect on customer delight These findings underscore the necessity for restaurant managers to prioritize not only product quality but also the quality of customer interactions to foster memorable and delightful dining experiences. By highlighting the pivotal role of service encounters in experiential dining, this study adds to the existing literature on customer experience management and provides practical insights for improving customer engagement in the restaurant industry.

Keywords: service encounter quality, customer delight, chinese hotpot restaurant

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive food and beverage industry, creating exceptional customer experiences has become a strategic priority for businesses seeking sustainable growth (Cheong et al., 2021; Chintia et al., 2022; Severesia et al., 2022; Yrjölä et al., 2019). With increasing consumer expectations and a wide variety of dining options available, restaurants must strive not only to satisfy customers but to delight them (Aktaş-Polat & Polat, 2021; Hubay et al., 2023; Parasuraman et al., 2020; Qazi et al., 2025; Rodríguez-López et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2020). Customer delight, characterized by positive emotions that exceed mere satisfaction, has been identified as a crucial factor in fostering customer loyalty and generating positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Antonio et al., 2023; Juliana et al., 2024a, 2023; Sihombing et al., 2024). Thus, understanding the drivers of customer delight is essential for restaurant operators aiming to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace (Aktaş-Polat & Polat, 2021; Dhm & Mshrm, 2021; Golani, 2017).

One emerging area of interest within customer experience research is the role of service encounter quality. Service encounters represent the "moments of truth" in which customers directly interact with service personnel, shaping their perceptions and emotional responses toward the business (Bolton et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2024). Unlike the product itself, which is tangible and relatively consistent, service encounters are dynamic, interactive, and often highly individualized (Bolton et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2024). The quality of these interactions can significantly influence customer evaluations of their overall dining experience, making them a critical touchpoint for value creation in the restaurant industry (Han et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2022; Jiao et al., 2024; H. Lin et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2021).

Chinese hotpot restaurants offer a unique context for examining the impact of service encounter quality. Unlike traditional dining experiences, hotpot is highly interactive, communal, and experiential (Han et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2022; Jiao et al., 2024; H. Lin et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2021). Diners not only consume the meal but also participate in its preparation at the table, often relying on guidance and support from restaurant staff. This participatory element increases the importance of service encounter quality, as attentive, responsive, and knowledgeable service personnel can enhance the enjoyment and memorability of the dining experience (Chen et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2021).

In Jakarta, the popularity of Chinese hotpot restaurants has surged in recent years, reflecting broader trends in urban culinary culture and consumer demand for novel and engaging food experiences. However, as more establishments enter the market, competition

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intensifies and customer expectations rise. It becomes imperative for restaurant managers to understand which aspects of the service encounter most strongly contribute to customer delight, enabling them to allocate resources and training efforts effectively (Chang, 2022; Chen et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2025; Lai, 2015; Zhong & Moon, 2020).

While prior research has established the significance of service quality in shaping customer satisfaction in the restaurant sector, fewer studies have examined the specific link between service encounter quality and the higher-order construct of customer delight particularly in Asian experiential dining contexts (Aryani et al., 2022; Choi & Jeon, 2020; Lai, 2015; Y. Liu et al., 2020). Most studies focus on product attributes such as taste, freshness, or presentation, potentially overlooking the crucial influence of human interactions and emotional engagement during the service delivery process (Juliana et al., 2020; Juliana et al., 2021, 2024b; Lemy et al., 2021; Sihombing et al., 2022).

Although customer satisfaction has long been a focus in the restaurant industry, many establishments still struggle to foster deeper emotional responses such as customer delight, which is critical for customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Alshreef et al., 2023; Foroudi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Usiña-Báscones et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). In the context of Chinese hotpot restaurants, where service encounters are highly interactive and central to the overall experience, it remains unclear which specific aspects of service encounter quality most significantly contribute to customer delight. This lack of understanding limits the ability of restaurant managers to design effective service strategies that consistently delight customers and sustain competitive advantage (Chen et al., 2020; Chunji, 2021; D. Liu et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020).

Previous studies on restaurant service quality predominantly focus on customer satisfaction and revisit intention, with limited exploration of the higher-order emotional construct of customer delight especially in Asian and experiential dining contexts like Chinese hotpot. Furthermore, existing research often addresses general service quality or product attributes, rather than dissecting the multidimensional nature of service encounter quality have a direct effects on customer delight. Thus, there is a need for empirical research that specifically examines how distinct dimensions of service encounter quality influence customer delight in the unique and growing segment of Chinese hotpot restaurants (Lam et al., 2023; Lau et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2024; Urdianti et al., 2023).

This research provides novel insights by empirically investigating the relationship between multiple dimensions of service encounter quality and customer delight within the experiential and communal context of Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta. Unlike prior studies that focus on satisfaction or loyalty in broader or Western dining settings, this study isolates the affective outcome of delight and examines its antecedents in a setting where service encounters are both complex and integral to the dining experience. By doing so, it contributes to the literature on hospitality management and service marketing, and addresses the paucity of research on emotional customer outcomes in Asian experiential dining (Agnihotri, 2021; Aktaş-Polat & Polat, 2021; El-Said et al., 2021; Terrah et al., 2022).

The primary aim of this research is to analyse service encounter quality influence customer delight in Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta. The study seeks to identify the most impactful factors within the service encounter that drive customer delight, thereby providing actionable recommendations for restaurant managers to enhance customer experiences, foster loyalty, and achieve sustainable competitive differentiation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Encounter Quality
Service encounter quality refers to the customer's perception of their direct interaction with service staff during the delivery of a service (Shie et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). In experiential dining environments like Chinese hotpot restaurants, where service is highly interactive and participative, these dimensions become particularly salient (Lin, 2021; Xie et al., 2023; Yemsi-Paillissé, 2024).

Studies have shown that high service encounter quality can enhance customer perceptions, create memorable experiences, and increase overall satisfaction (Bolton et al., 2021; Shie et al., 2022; Wu & Dong, 2023). However, while much research addresses satisfaction and loyalty, fewer studies have explored the emotional outcomes such as delight that result from superior service encounters in dynamic and communal restaurant settings (Genç & Kozak, 2020; Kim, 2021; Ryu et al., 2021; Tsaur & Lo, 2020).

Customer Delight
Customer delight is an affective response that arises when a customer's

experience exceeds their expectations, resulting in feelings of joy, surprise, or excitement (Barnes et al., 2016; D. C. Barnes & Krallman, 2019; Genç & Kozak, 2020; Ji & Prentice, 2021; Jiang, 2020).

Delighted customers are more likely to exhibit stronger loyalty, provide positive word-of-mouth, and return to the restaurant, making delight a strategic goal for service businesses. Unlike satisfaction, which is linked to the fulfilment of expected needs, delight is generated when customers experience something unexpectedly positive, often through personalized and engaging service encounters (Ji & Prentice, 2021; Petzer, 2021; Talapatra, 2023).

In the hospitality sector, customer delight is influenced not only by product quality but also by the emotional engagement and interaction during the service encounter (Alarcón-López et al., 2023; Bujisic et al., 2024; Le et al., 2021; Lopes et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2020; Terrah et al., 2022). The ability of service staff to anticipate, respond, and connect with customers at an emotional level can transform an ordinary dining event into a delightful, memorable experience (Bujisic et al., 2024; Caruelle et al., 2024; Frey-Cordes et al., 2020; Prentice & Nguyen, 2020; Valentini et al., 2020).

Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight

Recent studies have established a direct link between service encounter quality and customer delight, especially in settings where the service process is complex and co-created by both staff and customers (D. Barnes et al., 2020, 2022; Hangui, 2024; Jiang, 2020; Nguyen, 2020; Valentini et al., 2020). For instance, empathy and assurance have been identified as particularly influential in creating delight, as they foster feelings of being valued and cared for. In interactive and communal settings like Chinese hotpot restaurants, staff responsiveness such as timely assistance and proactive service can also heighten the likelihood of customer delight(Rao, 2025; Soares et al., 2023).

Despite the growing interest in emotional customer outcomes, there is a paucity of empirical research specifically examining which dimensions of service encounter quality most strongly influence delight in the context of Asian experiential dining (Aryani et al., 2022; Dhm & Mshrm, 2021; Illo, 2021; Polat, 2022). This research seeks to address this gap.

Based on the explanation above, it can be formulated that the hypothesis that service encounter quality has a positive and significant influence on customer delight can be formulated. This research is anchored in the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) (Oliver, 1980). EDT posits that customer satisfaction and delight result from the comparison between prior expectations and actual experiences. When service encounters substantially exceed expectations especially through personal attention, competence, and responsiveness customers experience positive disconfirmation, leading to delight rather than mere satisfaction (Anabila et al., 2021; Coetzee, 2019; Dhm & Mshrm, 2021; Magnini et al., 2011). Applying EDT to the hotpot restaurant context, it is proposed that high service encounter quality, manifested through its various dimensions, can generate delight by consistently and unexpectedly exceeding customer expectations during interactive dining experiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of service encounter quality on customer delight in Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta. The target population consists of customers who have dined at well-known Chinese hotpot establishments within the past three months. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, which were distributed directly to 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants had relevant and recent experience with the hotpot dining context. The questionnaire included items adapted from established scales measuring dimensions of service encounter quality namely responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles as well as customer delight, all assessed using a five-point Likert scale. Service encounter quality in restaurant settings is commonly measured using indicators adapted from the SERVQUAL framework, emphasizing dimensions such as responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles (Akhtar et al., 2021; Carrillo et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Meanwhile, customer delight is operationalized through emotional indicators such as surprise, joy or excitement, memorability, and positive affect, capturing responses that go beyond mere satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2016, 2020) Recent works also emphasize that delight involves a strong affective component that significantly predicts customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth in the dining experience (Ismagilova et al., 2021; Upamannyu et al., 2021). Together, these

measures enable a comprehensive evaluation of how service encounters create memorable and emotionally impactful experiences in the restaurant industry.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the relationships between the service encounter quality dimensions and customer delight (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Prior to hypothesis testing, the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments were evaluated through tests of construct validity, convergent validity, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability) (Hair· & Ray, 2023; Hair et al., 2019). The findings from this quantitative approach provide empirical evidence of the extent to which different aspects of service encounter quality contribute to creating customer delight in the highly interactive and experiential environment of Chinese hotpot restaurants.

This figure illustrates a structural model in which the construct "Service Encounter" is measured by five observed variables (SEQ1 to SEQ5), and "Customer Delight" is measured by three observed variables (CD1 to CD3). The diagram shows a direct path from Service Encounter to Customer Delight, indicating that the quality of service encounters is hypothesized to have a direct and positive impact on customer delight. Each latent variable is reflected by its respective indicators, highlighting how multiple dimensions of both service encounter quality and customer delight are captured in the analysis. This model visually represents the theorized relationship, supporting the idea that improving service interactions can lead to greater customer delight (Figure 1).

Source: Researcher, 2025

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demographic profile of the 100 respondents in this study reflects a diverse representation of customers who patronize Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta. In terms of gender, the sample was relatively balanced, with 54% female and 46% male respondents. The majority of participants were within the 21–35 age group (62%), indicating that young adults form a significant segment of the hotpot

restaurant market, followed by those aged 36–50 (25%), and the remaining 13% were above 50 years old. Educational backgrounds showed that most respondents held at least a bachelor's degree (68%), while 24% had completed high school and 8% possessed a postgraduate qualification. Regarding occupation, a significant proportion were private sector employees (39%), followed by university students (26%), entrepreneurs (18%), and civil servants (11%), with the rest being homemakers or retirees. Monthly income levels were also varied, with 48% earning IDR 5–10 million, 30% earning less than IDR 5 million, and 22% earning more than IDR 10 million. The frequency of visits revealed that 44% dined at Chinese hotpot restaurants at least once a month, 32% once every few months, and 24% visited more than twice a month. This demographic profile illustrates that Chinese hotpot restaurants in Jakarta appeal broadly to educated, young, and economically active individuals, highlighting the need for high service encounter quality to sustain customer delight across diverse customer segments.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Service Encounter Quality	0.810	0.817	0.875	0.637
Customer Delight	0.770	0.796	0.866	0.684

Table 1 and Figure 2 presents the reliability and validity statistics for the constructs Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight. The Cronbach's alpha values are 0.810 and 0.770, respectively, both exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating good internal consistency reliability. Composite reliability (rho_a and rho_c) values for both constructs range from 0.796 to 0.875, also surpassing the recommended cut-off of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019), further confirming reliability.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Service Encounter Quality is 0.637 and for Customer Delight is 0.684, both above the

recommended 0.5 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This demonstrates that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators, thus establishing convergent validity.

Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model exhibits satisfactory levels of reliability and convergent validity for both constructs, supporting their appropriateness for further structural analysis.

Source: Researcher, 2025

Figure 2 Outer Model

Table 2. HTMT Ratio

	HTMT
Service Encounter Quality→Customer Delight	0.826

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations is an advanced method for assessing discriminant validity in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In your Table 2, the HTMT value for the relationship between Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight is 0.826.

According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), discriminant validity is established if the HTMT value is below the threshold of 0.90 for conceptually distinct constructs. A more conservative threshold of 0.85 is sometimes recommended in the literature (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019), especially in the case of highly similar constructs. Since the HTMT value here is 0.826, it is below the 0.90 threshold, indicating that Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight are empirically distinct and discriminant validity is achieved. However, because it is slightly below the more conservative 0.85 threshold, it is recommended to interpret this value with some caution, but overall, it is still acceptable and supports the distinctiveness of these two constructs in your research model.

Table 3. Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

	VIF
Service Encounter Quality→Customer Delight	1.000

Table 3 displays the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the relationship between Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight, which is reported as 1.000. The VIF is a commonly used statistic to assess multicollinearity among predictor variables in a structural equation model. According to Hair et al. (2019), a VIF value below 5 (and more conservatively below 3.3) indicates that collinearity is not a concern in the model.

A VIF of 1.000 is the ideal value, indicating there is no collinearity between the predictor (Service Encounter Quality) and the outcome variable (Customer Delight). This result suggests that the model estimates for this path are stable, and the predictor provides unique explanatory power for Customer Delight without redundancy from other variables.

Table 4 presents several model fit indices for both the saturated and estimated models, including SRMR, d-ULS, d-G, Chi-square, and NFI. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for both models is 0.099. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), an SRMR value below 0.08 is generally considered a good fit; however, values below 0.10 can be considered acceptable in exploratory research or models with complex constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the SRMR value of 0.099 indicates an acceptable but marginal fit, suggesting that there may be minor areas for model improvement.

The d-ULS (Unweighted Least Squares discrepancy) and d-G (Geodesic discrepancy) values are 0.276 and 0.121, respectively. These indices do not have universal cut-off values, but lower values generally indicate better model fit (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Both the saturated and estimated models display identical values for d-ULS and d-G, demonstrating consistency.

The Chi-square value is 76.571. While a lower chi-square relative to degrees of freedom indicates a better fit, chi-square values are often sensitive to sample size and model complexity (Kline, 2016), so should not be interpreted in isolation.

The Normed Fit Index (NFI) for both models is 0.750. According to Bentler and Bonett (1980), an NFI value above 0.90 is generally desirable, though values above 0.70 may be considered acceptable in early-stage or exploratory research. The NFI value here indicates that while the model fit is moderate, there is room for further improvement in model specification.

Overall, these results indicate that the model demonstrates acceptable but not optimal fit, which is common in early-stage or exploratory research using PLS-SEM. The indices suggest that the measurement and structural models are generally adequate, but

refinement may enhance overall model fit in future studies.

Table 4. Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.099	0.099
d-ULS	0.276	0.276
d-G	0.121	0.121
Chi-square	76.571	76.571
NFI	0.750	0.750

Table 5. R Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Customer Delight	0.099	0.099

Table 5 presents the R Square and R Square Adjusted values for the endogenous variable Customer Delight, both at 0.099. This means that the predictor(s) in your model specifically, Service Encounter Quality account for approximately 9.9% of the variance in Customer Delight.

In social science and behavioral research, R Square values are generally interpreted as follows: values around 0.75 are considered substantial, 0.50 moderate, and 0.25 weak (Hair et al., 2019). An R Square value of 0.099 therefore indicates that the model has low explanatory power, suggesting that Service Encounter Quality explains only a small fraction of the variance in Customer Delight. While the relationship may still be statistically significant, these results imply that other variables not included in the model are likely to have a greater influence on Customer Delight.

The R Square Adjusted value, also at 0.099, confirms the stability of this finding, as it adjusts for the number of predictors and the sample size in the model.

An R² value of 0.099 indicates that the independent variable in this study only explains 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, namely customer delight. This relatively small contribution can be attributed to several factors. First, it is likely that there are other factors beyond service encounter that also influence customer delight, such as product quality,

pricing, environmental atmosphere, or the emotional and psychological aspects of customers that were not measured in this study. Second, the varying characteristics of respondents and different service contexts may also lead to diverse assessments of customer delight, thereby reducing the direct influence of service encounter. Third, customer delight itself is a multidimensional construct and is often affected by complex interactions between various aspects of service and personal customer experiences. Therefore, this low R² value provides important input for future research to expand the model by including other relevant variables in order to more comprehensively explain the variance in customer delight.

Table 6. f Square

	f Square
Service Encounter Quality→Customer Delight	0.802

Table 6 shows the f Square value for the relationship between Service Encounter Quality and Customer Delight, reported as 0.802. The f Square statistic measures the effect size, indicating the impact of an exogenous (predictor) variable on an endogenous (outcome) variable in a structural equation model. An f Square value of 0.802 is well above the threshold for a large effect, suggesting that Service Encounter Quality has a substantial impact on Customer Delight within the model. This strong effect size demonstrates that, although the R Square for Customer Delight is relatively low, the contribution of Service Encounter Quality to explaining the variance in Customer Delight is highly significant. This result implies that Service Encounter Quality is a key driver of Customer Delight, even if other factors also play a role in the overall model.
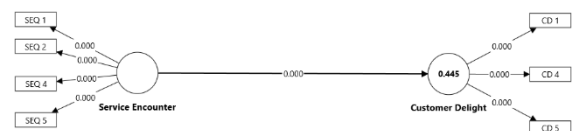
Source: Researcher, 2025
Figure 3. Inner Model

Table 7 Hypothesis test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Result
Service Encounter Quality→ Customer Delight	0.667	0.676	0.057	11.709	0.000	Supported

Table 7 presents the results of the hypothesis test examining the effect of Service Encounter Quality on Customer Delight. The original sample path coefficient (O) is 0.667, with a sample mean (M) of 0.676 and a standard deviation (STDEV) of 0.057. The T statistic is 11.709, and the corresponding P value is 0.000, indicating statistical significance at the 0.001 level.

A path coefficient of 0.667 signifies a strong positive effect of Service Encounter Quality on Customer Delight. The high T statistic (above the commonly used threshold of 1.645 and the very low P value (< 0.05) confirm that this relationship is highly significant and not due to random chance. The low standard deviation suggests stability and consistency in the bootstrapping estimates.

The result is marked as "Supported", meaning the data provide strong evidence to accept the hypothesis that better service encounter quality significantly enhances customer delight. This finding underscores the critical importance of focusing on service encounter quality in efforts to increase customer delight in the context studied.

Source: Researcher, 2025

Figure 4. IPMA

The Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) demonstrates that SEQ5 is both highly important and well-performed, indicating it is a key strength in delivering Customer Delight and should be maintained at its current level. SEQ4 also shows strong performance and moderate importance, supporting overall service quality, while SEQ1, though less important, still performs adequately and should continue to be monitored. Notably, SEQ2 reveals moderate importance but the lowest performance score, highlighting it as a potential area for targeted improvement to optimize service outcomes. Overall, the IPMA suggests that management should prioritize improvements for indicators that are important yet underperforming, such as SEQ2, while maintaining high standards for those with high importance and performance, thereby enabling the most effective allocation of resources to enhance Customer Delight.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which assessed the influence of service encounter quality on customer delight using PLS-SEM, align with and extend existing literature on service management and consumer behavior. The measurement model demonstrated strong internal consistency and convergent validity, consistent with the recommendations by Hair et al. (2019), and discriminant validity was supported, confirming the empirical distinctiveness of the constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). This robust measurement foundation lends credibility to subsequent structural model interpretations.

The structural analysis revealed a significant positive effect of service encounter quality on customer delight (path coefficient = 0.667, p < 0.001), echoing earlier studies by Kim and Mattila (2013) and Ali et al. (2021), who found that high-quality interactions with frontline staff play a critical role in generating positive emotional responses and memorable experiences among customers. Furthermore, the large effect size (f^2 = 0.802) corroborates the assertion by Wu and Liang (2009) that superior
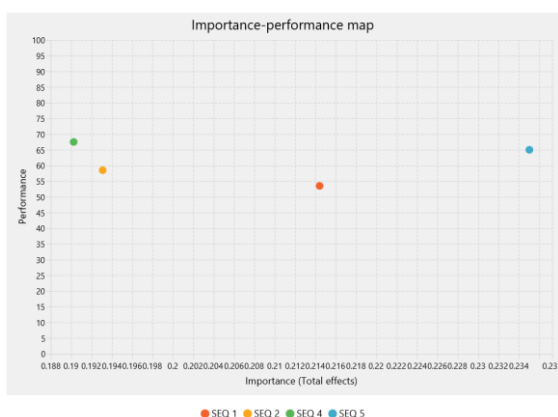
service encounters can be a primary driver of customer delight, going beyond mere satisfaction to foster strong affective engagement and positive word-of-mouth. However, the low R² value (0.099) indicates that service encounter quality alone explains less than 10% of the variance in customer delight, suggesting, as also noted by Barnes et al. (2016), that customer delight is a multidimensional construct influenced by other factors such as product quality, ambience, authenticity, and emotional contagion.

The model fit indices, while within acceptable limits for exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2019), suggest the need for ongoing model refinement. This finding is consistent with recommendations by Ladhari et al. (2017), who emphasize the importance of continually re-evaluating service models as customer expectations and competitive environments evolve.

The Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) further enhances these results by identifying actionable priorities. The finding that SEQ5 is both highly important and well-performed aligns with the work of Han and Hyun (2017), who emphasized the importance of maintaining excellence in key service attributes to sustain competitive advantage. Conversely, the lower performance of SEQ2, despite its moderate importance, echoes suggestions by Jiang and Wang (2023) that targeted improvements in underperforming service elements can yield disproportionately positive effects on overall customer delight.

Taken together, this study supports and extends prior research by reaffirming the centrality of service encounter quality to customer delight in hospitality contexts, while also highlighting the need for a holistic approach that addresses multiple touchpoints and incorporates continuous performance monitoring. For practitioners, these findings underscore the importance of strategically investing in both maintaining high standards in critical service areas and identifying improvement opportunities in weaker aspects, thereby optimizing the overall customer experience.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that service encounter quality has a significant and positive effect on customer delight within the hospitality context, as indicated by a strong path coefficient and substantial effect size using PLS-SEM. Despite this, the relatively low R² value suggests that while service encounter quality is a key driver, other unmeasured factors also contribute to customer delight, emphasizing the multidimensional nature of this outcome. The IPMA highlights not only strengths to maintain but also specific areas needing improvement, offering clear priorities for managerial action. Theoretically, these results reinforce the critical yet partial role of service encounter quality in customer delight and encourage future research to explore additional influences such as emotional engagement and service atmosphere. Practically, the findings equip hospitality managers with data-driven guidance to sustain high-performing areas and strategically enhance weaker service aspects, ultimately supporting ongoing efforts to deliver superior customer experiences and build lasting loyalty.

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