The Influence of People, Process, and Physical Evidence on Word of Mouth Through Customer Satisfaction at Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta

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Abstract: The hospitality industry has shown significant recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by increasingly intense competition, particularly in cultural tourism destinations such as Yogyakarta. Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta, a four-star hotel with a strong digital reputation, continues to face challenges in achieving its customer satisfaction targets. This study aims to analyze the influence of People, Process, and Physical Evidence on Word of Mouth (WoM), with Customer Satisfaction as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative approach, primary data were collected from 333 respondents who had stayed at Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta within the last three months. Hypothesis testing was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.2 software. The results show that all three elements People, Process, and Physical Evidence have a positive influence on both Customer Satisfaction and Word of Mouth, either directly or indirectly through Customer Satisfaction. Moreover, Customer Satisfaction itsel has a significant positive impact on Word of Mouth. These findings contribute theoretically to the service marketing literature, particularly in the hospitality industry context, and offer strategic recommendations for hotel management to improve customer satisfaction to drive Word of Mouth as a strategy for achieving competitive advantage.

Keyword: Customer Satisfaction, Word of Mouth, People, Process, Physical Evidence, Hospitality Industry, Service Marketing, SEM-PLS

INTRODUCTION

The global hospitality industry has shown a significant recovery trend following the COVID-19 pandemic, with the global hotel and resort market size estimated to reach USD 1.5 trillion in 2023, representing an increase of approximately 4.9% compared to the previous year (Statista, 2024). Market projections indicate a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.58%, with the market expected to grow from USD 820.67 billion in 2023 to USD 1.557 trillion by 2030 (Exactitude Consultancy, 2023). This growth signals substantial opportunities for hospitality players to meet the rising demand for quality accommodation services.

At the national level, Indonesia's tourism and hospitality sector also contributes significantly to the country's economy, targeting a contribution of 4.6% to the GDP by 2025, with foreign exchange earnings ranging from USD 19 billion to USD 22.1 billion (Indonesia.go.id, 2023). Particularly in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) indicates an increase in the number of star-rated hotel rooms from 16,293 units in 2021 to 18,818 units in 2023, reflecting intensifying competition among hotels (Badan Pusat Statistik Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 2023)

Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta, a four-star hotel operating in this region, enjoys a positive reputation based on digital platform reviews, including a rating of 8.9/10 on Traveloka and 4.6/5 on Tiket.com. However, internal data reveals that the hotel's Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) remains below management targets, improving from 3.57 in 2022 to 3.70 in 2024, yet still short of the target score of 4.0. Initial interviews with hotel guests also indicate inconsistencies in service quality, particularly regarding facilities and service timeliness, which may adversely affect overall customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction plays a crucial role in driving Word of Mouth (WOM), where customer recommendations are perceived as more credible than company promotions. According to Oliver's Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) (1980), satisfaction arises when the perceived performance of a service meets or exceeds initial expectations, which subsequently fosters customer loyalty and positive WOM.

In the modern hospitality industry, the elements of People (hotel staff), Process (service procedures), and Physical Evidence (physical facilities) form the core foundation for creating satisfying customer experiences and differentiating hotels from competitors (Mahmoud et al., 2024). Professional and responsive staff, efficient service processes including check-in and check-out (Hospitalityinsights, 2025) as well as clean and appealing physical conditions, greatly influence perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction levels. This study is crucial to identify and improve the factors affecting customer satisfaction at Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta. With increasing customer expectations, without consistent service enhancements, the risk of stagnation or decline in satisfaction presents a serious threat to the hotel's competitiveness amid intensifying market competition.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal research design to examine the relationships between the independent variables People, Process, and Physical Evidence and the dependent variable Word of Mouth, with Customer Satisfaction acting as a mediating variable (Hair Jr. et al., 2021). The object of the research is Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta, where the population includes customers who live in Yogyakarta and have made at least one purchase in the past three months. Since the total population is unknown, the minimum sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 91 required samples (Cochran, 1977). However, a total of 333 valid responses were collected to improve data robustness (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, where samples were selected based on ease of access and respondent availability (Syahza et al., 2021). The research was conducted over one month in April 2025. A structured questionnaire was developed using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and the instrument was tested for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Hair Jr. et al., 2021). The research procedure involved reviewing literature, developing hypotheses, distributing questionnaires, collecting responses, and analyzing data. Primary data were obtained directly through the questionnaires, while secondary data were collected from scholarly journals, books, reports, and credible websites (Zikmund & Carr, 2023).

Data analysis was carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for complex models and non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2022). Additionally, the Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) technique was used to identify strategic improvement areas (Ringle et al., 2020).
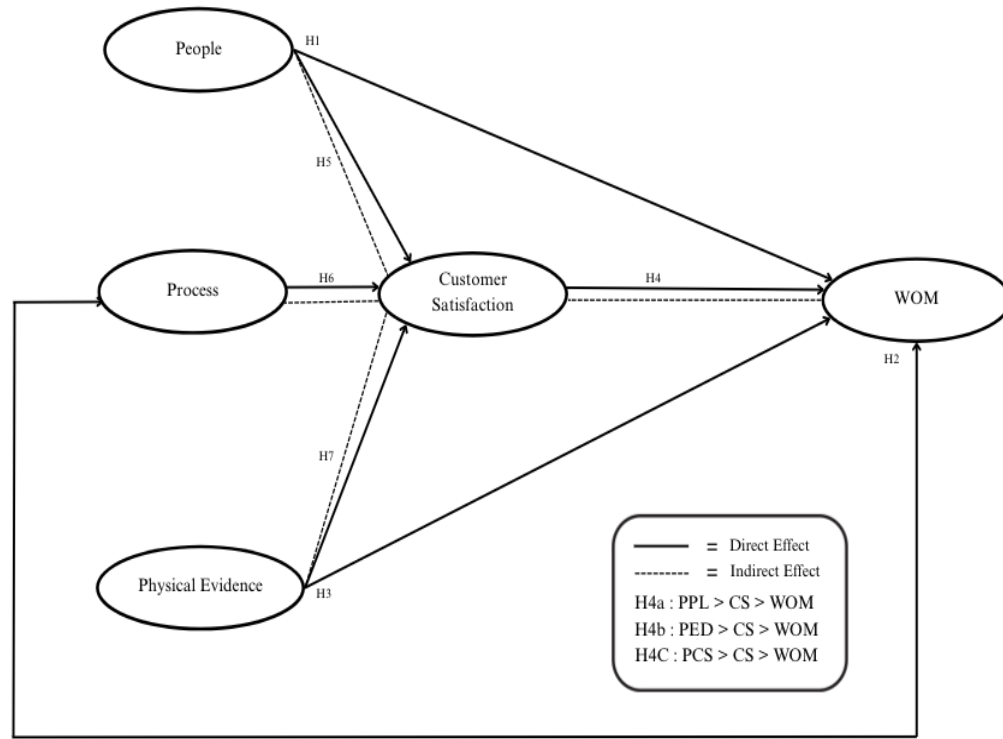

Figure 1. Research Model

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Respondent Profile

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	152	45.6%
	Female	181	54.4%
Age	12 - 27 Years Old	107	32.1%
	28 - 43 Years Old	129	38.7%
	44 - 59 Years Old	97	29.1%
Status	Married	226	67.9%
	Single	107	32.1%
Job	Student	51	15.3%
	Employee	108	32.4%
	Housewife	62	18.6%
	Entrepreneur / Business Owner	112	33.6%
Place	Yogyakarta	331	99.4%
	Outside Yogyakarta	2	0.6%

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

The majority of participants in this study were female, aged between 28 and 43 years old, and married. Most respondents were either entrepreneurs or employees and resided in the Yogyakarta area.

Convergent Validity

Table 2. Convergent Validity Test Results

Construct	Code	Outer Loading (>0.70)	AVE (>0.5)
Customer Satisfaction	CS 1	0.736	0.556
	CS 2	0.758	
	CS 3	0.709	
	CS 4	0.744	
	CS 5	0.734	
	CS 6	0.735	
	CS 7	0.798	
Process	PCS 1	0.794	0.564
	PCS 2	0.778	
	PCS 3	0.775	
	PCS 4	0.827	
	PCS 5	0.799	
Physical Evidence	PED 1	0.755	0.568
	PED 2	0.760	
	PED 3	0.757	
	PED 4	0.730	
	PED 5	0.769	
	PED 6	0.739	
	PED 7	0.766	
People	PPL 1	0.785	0.632
	PPL 2	0.731	
	PPL 3	0.750	
	PPL 4	0.756	
	PPL 5	0.730	
Word of Mouth	WOM 1	0.790	0.609
	WOM 2	0.759	
	WOM 3	0.760	
	WOM 4	0.781	
	WOM 5	0.811	

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Based on the results in Table 2, all indicators for each construct met convergent validity criteria, with factor loadings above 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeding 0.50. Thus, all indicators were confirmed to be convergently valid.

Discriminant Validity

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Test – Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Results

	PPL	PCS	PED	CS	WOM
Customer Satisfaction					
People	0.567				
Physical Evidence	0.816	0.419			
Process	0.766	0.500	0.848		
Word of Mouth	0.824	0.690	0.730	0.746	

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Based on Table 3, all HTMT values are below 0.90, indicating that each construct meets the discriminant validity criteria. Therefore, the indicators effectively measure their intended constructs without overlapping with unrelated constructs.

Multicollinearity

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test Results

	CS	PPL	PED	PCS	WOM
People	1.222				2.445
Process	2.180				1.339
Physical Evidence	2.314				2.717
Customer Satisfaction					2.441
Word of Mouth					

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Table 4 shows that all constructs have Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below the maximum threshold of 5.00. This indicates that the research model is free from multicollinearity issues, with no excessive linear relationships among the independent constructs.

R-Square

Tabel 5. R-Square Test Result

Variable	R-Square	Description
Customer Satisfaction	0.591	Strong Influence
Word of Mouth	0.612	Strong Influence

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

This study examines two dependent constructs: Customer Satisfaction and Word of Mouth. The R-Square value for Customer Satisfaction is 0.591, meaning 59.1% of its variation is explained by People, Process, and Physical Evidence. For Word of Mouth, the R-Square is 0.612, indicating that 61.2% of its variation is explained by Customer Satisfaction. The rest is influenced by other factors outside the model.

F-Square

Tabel 6. F-Square Test Result

Path Coefficient	F-Square	Description
Customer Satisfaction > Word of Mouth	0.136	Small
People > Customer Satisfaction	0.096	Small
People > Word of Mouth	0.142	Small
Physical Evidence > Customer Satisfaction	0.246	Moderate
Physical Evidence > Word of Mouth	0.020	Small
Process > Customer Satisfaction	0.055	Small
Process > Word Of Mouth	0.032	Small

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Table 6 shows that most constructs have a small effect size (F^2), such as Customer Satisfaction on Word of Mouth (0.136), People on Customer Satisfaction (0.096), and Word of

Mouth (0.142). Physical Evidence has a medium effect on Customer Satisfaction (0.246), but only a small effect on Word of Mouth (0.020). Process also shows small effects on both Customer Satisfaction (0.055) and Word of Mouth (0.032). These results suggest that each construct has a limited impact on the model when removed.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypotesis	Path Coefficient	Standardized Path Coefficient	T Statistics >1.645	P Values <0.05	Decision
H1	People > Word of Mouth	0.272	3.772	0.000	Supported
H2	Process > Word Of Mouth	0.173	2.960	0.003	Supported
H3	Physical Evidence > Word of Mouth	0.147	2.023	0.043	Supported
H4	Customer Satisfaction > Word of Mouth	0.359	4.469	0.000	Supported
H5	People > Customer Satisfaction	0.219	3.472	0.001	Supported
H6	Process > Customer Satisfaction	0.228	3.619	0.000	Supported
H7	Physical Evidence > Customer Satisfaction	0.469	7.565	0.000	Supported

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Based on the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 7, all proposed hypotheses in this study are supported. The constructs of People, Process, and Physical Evidence each have a positive and significant effect on both Word of Mouth and Customer Satisfaction. Additionally, Customer Satisfaction also has a significant positive influence on Word of Mouth. These conclusions are supported by T-statistic values exceeding 1.645 and p-values below the 0.05 significance threshold, confirming the statistical significance of all relationships tested in the model.

Indirect Effect Testing

Table 8. Mediation Test Results

Hypotesis	Path Coefficient	Standardized Path Coefficient	T Statistics >1.645	P Values <0.05	Decision
H4a	People > Customer Satisfaction > Word of Mouth	0.078	3.146	0.002	Supported
H4b	Physical Evidence > Customer Satisfaction > Word of Mouth	0.168	3.553	0.000	Supported
H4c	Process > Customer Satisfaction > Word of Mouth	0.082	2.609	0.009	Supported

Source: Data Processing Results (2025)

Table 8 demonstrates that Customer Satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between People, Process, and Physical Evidence with Word of Mouth. The indirect effects of all three constructs through Customer Satisfaction are statistically significant, with T-statistics above 1.645 and p-values below 0.05. These findings indicate that improved service quality whether through human resources, efficient service processes, or physical environment

enhances customer satisfaction, which in turn increases the likelihood of customers sharing positive experiences through word of mouth.

The Influence of People on Word of Mouth

The first hypothesis indicates that People have a positive influence on Word of Mouth. The higher the quality of hotel staff performance, the greater the likelihood that customers will recommend the hotel to others. People are defined as staff or employees who directly interact with customers, where their quality, skills, and attitudes greatly affect the customer experience. The main appreciated indicator is the staff's consistency in implementing service culture such as friendliness and punctuality. This finding aligns with research by (Kim et al., 2024; Mahmoud et al., 2024; Yuliana et al., 2023) which also show a positive correlation between People and Word of Mouth.

The Influence of Process on Word of Mouth

The second hypothesis shows that Process has a positive effect on Word of Mouth. The smoother and more efficient the service process, the greater the likelihood customers will recommend the hotel to others. Process refers to the operational steps that ensure consistent and effective customer experience (Chana et al., 2021) . Descriptive analysis shows that the ease of payment methods is the most appreciated aspect by customers, providing convenience during check-in and check-out. This positively impacts the overall customer experience and encourages them to share positive experiences. This finding is consistent with studies by (Kawiana et al., 2021; Murpraptomo et al., 2019; Sari & Atmajawati, 2024) emphasizing the importance of speed, efficiency, and quality of service processes in enhancing satisfaction and promoting Word of Mouth.

The Influence of Physical Evidence on Word of Mouth

The third hypothesis indicates that Physical Evidence positively influences Word of Mouth. The better the physical evidence perceived by customers such as cleanliness, facilities, and visual appearance the more likely they are to recommend the hotel to others. Physical Evidence includes tangible elements experienced by customers during service interaction, such as physical environment, facilities, and branding (Limna et al., 2023). Descriptive analysis shows that the highest-rated indicator is "The hotel room facilities are clean," indicating that room cleanliness is highly valued by customers and plays an important role in shaping satisfaction and encouraging Word of Mouth. This finding is consistent with research by (Murpraptomo et al., 2019; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Teng et al., 2022; Yuliana et al., 2023) which confirm that good physical elements create positive experiences and motivate customers to recommend the service to others.

The Influence of Customer Satisfaction on Word of Mouth

The fourth hypothesis shows that Customer Satisfaction positively affects Word of Mouth. The higher the customer satisfaction, the greater the likelihood they will recommend the hotel to others. Customer Satisfaction is defined as the extent to which customer expectations are met by service performance (Diatmono et al., 2020). The highest indicator in the descriptive analysis is "I am satisfied with my decision to stay at this hotel," reflecting Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta's success in meeting guests' overall expectations. This satisfaction level encourages loyalty and the desire to recommend the hotel. This finding aligns with studies by (D. Khaled et al., 2021; Luu Thi Thuy et al., 2024; Mai et al., 2021) which show that satisfaction with service, facilities, and stay experience significantly drives Word of Mouth both directly and through online reviews.

The Influence of People on Word of Mouth through Customer Satisfaction

This study also tests the role of Customer Satisfaction as a mediator between People, Process, and Physical Evidence on Word of Mouth. Results show that customer satisfaction positively mediates the effect of these three variables. In other words, Customer Satisfaction mediates the relationship between People and Word of Mouth. The higher the quality of service by Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta's staff, the greater the customer satisfaction. This satisfaction then strengthens consumers' intention to recommend the hotel to colleagues and their environment.

The Influence of Physical Evidence on Word of Mouth through Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction also mediates the relationship between Physical Evidence and Word of Mouth. When customers are satisfied with physical elements such as cleanliness and hotel facilities, their willingness to recommend the hotel increases.

The Influence of Process on Word of Mouth through Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Process and Word of Mouth. Smooth service processes at Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta increase customer satisfaction, which then encourages them to provide positive recommendations about the hotel.

The Influence of People on Customer Satisfaction

The fifth hypothesis shows that People positively influence Customer Satisfaction. The better the quality of service provided by hotel staff, the higher the level of customer satisfaction. Friendly, responsive, and professional service shapes a pleasant stay experience and improves positive perceptions of overall service quality. Quality personal interactions create comfort and make guests feel valued. This finding is consistent with research by (Farah et al., 2022; Singh & Verma, 2017; Sudari et al., 2019) which confirm that competent and proactive staff in addressing customer needs and complaints contribute significantly to increased satisfaction.

The Influence of Process on Customer Satisfaction

The sixth hypothesis shows that Process positively influences Customer Satisfaction. The smoother and more efficient the service process, the higher the customer satisfaction. Processes that run smoothly without obstacles, with clear and fast procedures provide guests with a comfortable stay experience. This finding aligns with studies by (Adelia & Aprianingsih, 2023; Singh & Verma, 2017; Sudari et al., 2019) which state that service efficiency, speed in handling guest needs, and ease of access to facilities are important factors shaping customer satisfaction.

The Influence of Physical Evidence on Customer Satisfaction

The seventh hypothesis shows that Physical Evidence positively affects Customer Satisfaction. The better the quality of physical elements such as room cleanliness, facility comfort, interior aesthetics, and completeness of supporting amenities, the higher the satisfaction level of Hotel Lafayette Yogyakarta's customers. A well-maintained and clean physical environment enhances comfort and meets guest expectations, thereby significantly increasing satisfaction. This finding is consistent with research by (Adelia & Aprianingsih, 2023; Farah et al., 2022; Murpraptomo et al., 2019; Sudari et al., 2019) which emphasize the importance of physical quality in creating a pleasant stay experience and enhancing perceptions of overall service quality.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the relationship between People, Process, and Physical Evidence and their impact on Word of Mouth, with a particular focus on enhancing Customer Satisfaction.

All constructs and indicators met the required validity and reliability criteria. The results addressed ten research questions and revealed that the People variable had the most significant positive influence on Word of Mouth. This highlights the importance of maintaining and improving performance in this area to enhance customer satisfaction and encourage positive customer advocacy.

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