
Gender Issues and Their Impact on Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness in Budget Hotels within Tourism Industry

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Abstract:

This study examines the influence of gender on guest complaint handling in budget hotels in Batam City, Indonesia—an industrial centre that has also become a growing tourist destination. A total of 182 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, and data analysis was conducted using Smart PLS. The research focuses on four service quality dimensions: assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability. Results indicate that gender significantly moderates the relationships between assurance, empathy, and responsiveness with complaint handling effectiveness, but does not moderate reliability. Specifically, male respondents show a stronger moderating effect on responsiveness, while female respondents exhibit stronger moderating effects on assurance and empathy. No significant moderating role of gender was found for reliability. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender differences in service strategies to enhance guest satisfaction and complaint resolution in the budget hotel sector

Keywords: Gender, Service Quality, Guest Complaint, Moderating Effect

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has become one of the many sectors experiencing significant growth. This development is evident from the increasing number of tourists visiting destinations in various countries, especially after the decline of COVID-19 cases. Such growth has encouraged the emergence of various forms of accommodation, including budget hotels (Ramadhan & Kusumah, 2022). Budget hotels have become a popular choice for travellers seeking affordable lodging while still expecting functional and standard service. In its operations, budget hotels face unique challenges in maintaining guest satisfaction, particularly in terms of complaint handling (Sunarsa, 2020). Effective complaint management is a crucial indicator for sustaining guest loyalty and service reputation.

Within the context of budget hotel services, gender issues are receiving growing attention, especially in staff–guest interactions. Gender does not merely refer to the biological differences between men and women, but also to social constructs that influence behaviour,

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expectations, and responses in social interactions (Wicaksono & Leonandri, 2019). In service environments such as hospitality, gender stereotypes can affect guests' perceptions of staff competence and influence how staff respond to complaints.

Previous research shows that perceptions and expectations of service staff are often shaped by gender identity. For example, female staff are often expected to demonstrate more friendliness, patience, and empathy compared to male staff. This potentially affects how guests voice complaints and how staff respond. In certain situations, gender may enhance or even hinder the effectiveness of communication in complaint resolution. Gender-based perceptual imbalances may lead to inconsistent complaint handling, thereby disrupting service standards that should be neutral and professional (Chan et al., 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how gender dynamics influence the effectiveness of complaint handling in budget hotels. Such understanding can serve as a foundation for formulating strategies to improve. Services quality in a more inclusive and equitable manner (Al-Rousan & Abuamoud, 2013)

Budget hotels, which generally operate with limited staff and fewer resources compared to star-rated hotels, are particularly vulnerable to gender-related dynamics in service delivery. The lack of gender equality-based training and the pressure of operational demands may lead to imbalances in complaint handling. Male staff may be assumed to be more resilient in handling aggressive complaints, while female staff are often considered more suitable for addressing emotional complaints—regardless of individual competence

Moreover, it is possible that guests themselves bring gender biases into their interactions with hotel staff. For instance, a male guest filing a complaint to a female staff member may exhibit different behaviour compared to when interacting with a male staff member, and vice versa (Cockburn-Wooten, 2012). These differences can affect the process of expressing, processing, and resolving complaints. As a result, a managerial approach that is sensitive to gender issues becomes increasingly relevant in the context of budget hotels. Within the broader scope of the tourism industry, sensitivity to gender issues in public service areas reflects the industry's maturity and readiness to meet global demands.

Sustainable tourism is not only concerned with environmental aspects but also encompasses social dimensions, including equality and fairness in service (Çakmakoglu Arıcı, 2020). Budget hotels, as an essential part of the tourism value chain, must also take an active role in promoting service practices that acknowledge such social dynamics. According to (Sosianika et al., 2021) prompt and empathetic responses to guest complaints enhance guests' perceptions of service quality and foster loyalty. However, research has shown that gender factors can influence how staff respond to complaints and how guests evaluate those responses (Wibowo, Agung Edy; Vargo, 2024).

On the other hand, hotel guests also carry gender biases when delivering complaints. A study conducted by Grandey et al. (2005) in (Silva & Couto, 2023) found that guests tend to evaluate female staff responses more critically, particularly if they do not express high levels of empathy. This indicates that guest perceptions are influenced by gender-based expectations, not merely by the actual quality of the response. In the context of budget hotels, which rely on workforce efficiency and standardized service procedures, the flexibility to tailor services to individual guest needs may be limited. According to

Brotherton (2003) in (Silva & Couto, 2023), budget hotels typically lack a dedicated complaint management division, leaving the responsibility of handling complaints directly to frontline staff. This situation requires staff to be capable of managing various interaction dynamics, including differing expectations arising from gender-related factors.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore how gender issues affect the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of service standards that are responsive to gender issues, while also offering insights for hotel management on the importance of fostering an inclusive work culture that can address the growing diversity demands within the tourism industry.

2. Theoretical Background

Social Role Theory

This theory was originally proposed by Eagly (1987), posits that societal expectations shape gendered behaviors, communication patterns, and emotional expressions. Men and women are socialized to adopt distinct social roles: men are often associated with agentic traits such as assertiveness, independence, and control, while women are linked with communal traits such as empathy, warmth, and nurturing (Eagly & Wood, 2012) in (Al-Rousan & Abuamoud, 2013). In the context of hospitality services, these socially constructed roles influence how guests perceive and respond to employee interactions. Male guests may evaluate service quality through instrumental or efficiency-oriented lenses, whereas female guests may emphasize relational and emotional aspects of service encounters.

When guests interact with employees of different genders, these ingrained expectations often shape comfort levels, satisfaction, and perceived professionalism. For instance, female guests may feel more comfortable expressing dissatisfaction or seeking empathy from female staff, who are stereotypically viewed as more understanding and emotionally responsive (Mattila, 2000) in (Al-Rousan & Abuamoud, 2013). Conversely, interactions between male guests and female employees might trigger a more courteous but reserved communication dynamic, where emotional engagement is minimized to maintain professionalism. Such variations reflect how gendered social scripts guide both guests' and employees' behaviors in service encounters.

Social Role Theory also helps explain asymmetrical evaluations of service failures and recovery efforts. Research suggests that women, given their communal orientation, may respond more positively to empathetic apologies and interpersonal warmth, while men tend to prioritize problem-solving efficiency and timeliness (Mattila & Enz, 2002; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2009). This implies that the perceived effectiveness of complaint handling strategies can differ significantly based on both the guest's and the employee's gender. A mismatch between expected gender roles—such as a male employee offering excessive emotional reassurance or a female employee displaying assertive behavior—may even reduce perceived authenticity and service satisfaction.

Overall, integrating Social Role Theory into hospitality research provides a valuable framework for understanding gendered service dynamics. It highlights that guest satisfaction is not merely a function of service quality dimensions but also of gender-based expectations and relational cues shaped by cultural norms. In markets like Indonesia, where hospitality is deeply embedded in collectivist and gender-sensitive cultural values, recognizing these gender-role interactions is crucial for designing tailored service training and complaint management strategies. By acknowledging the interplay between gender identity, employee behavior, and customer expectations, hotels can foster more authentic and contextually sensitive service experiences.

Assurance

The effectiveness of guest complaint handling using the variable of assurance can be seen through how well hotel employees instill confidence and trust in their guests during the service recovery process. Assurance refers to the employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to convey trust and credibility. When staff demonstrate professionalism, competence, and sincerity in addressing complaints, guests tend to feel that their concerns are taken seriously, which strengthens their perception of the hotel's reliability and service quality.

Moreover, assurance plays a crucial role in reducing guest anxiety and dissatisfaction during complaint situations. Many guests who voice complaints seek not only a solution but also reassurance that such issues will not occur again. Employees who communicate clearly, show empathy, and provide transparent explanations about corrective actions create a sense of security. This emotional assurance can transform a negative experience into a moment of regained trust, leading to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, assurance directly influences the long-term reputation and success of hospitality organizations. When guests consistently experience effective complaint handling backed by assurance, they are more likely to perceive the establishment as trustworthy and professional. This perception encourages positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits, which are vital for sustaining competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. Therefore, strengthening the assurance dimension through training, consistent communication standards, and empowered service recovery processes is essential for enhancing the overall effectiveness of guest complaint handling.

H₁ : Gender significantly moderates the relationship between the assurance variable and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels.

Empathy

The effectiveness of guest complaint handling using the variable of empathy lies in the ability of hotel employees to understand and share the feelings of guests who experience dissatisfaction. Empathy allows service staff to see a situation from the guest's perspective, which helps them respond not only with solutions but also with emotional sensitivity. When guests feel that their frustrations are acknowledged and that the staff genuinely care about their experience, it reduces emotional tension and

opens the door for constructive dialogue, making the complaint handling process more effective.

Furthermore, empathy enhances communication between guests and employees during service recovery. A guest who feels listened to and respected is more willing to cooperate and accept the proposed solutions. By using empathetic communication—such as attentive listening, maintaining eye contact, and offering sincere apologies—employees can transform a negative encounter into an opportunity for relationship building. This emotional connection helps rebuild trust, leading to increased satisfaction even when the initial service failure cannot be fully corrected.

In the long term, embedding empathy into complaint handling practices contributes significantly to customer loyalty and positive brand image. Guests who experience empathetic service tend to remember how the staff made them feel, not merely how their issue was solved. This emotional impression often translates into repeat visits and favorable recommendations to others. Therefore, cultivating empathy through staff training, role-playing, and supportive leadership becomes a strategic necessity for improving the overall effectiveness of guest complaint handling in the hospitality industry.

H₂ : Gender significantly moderates the relationship between the empathy variable and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels

Responsiveness

The effectiveness of guest complaint handling using the variable of responsiveness is reflected in how quickly and willingly hotel employees respond to guest concerns. Responsiveness refers to the promptness, attentiveness, and readiness of staff to assist guests when problems arise. In complaint situations, a timely response demonstrates that the hotel values its guests and prioritizes their satisfaction. When employees address issues without delay, guests perceive the service as efficient and professional, which can prevent frustration from escalating into dissatisfaction or negative reviews. Moreover, responsiveness contributes to the guest's perception of the hotel's overall service quality. Guests tend to associate quick and proactive actions with competence and commitment to customer care. For instance, when a guest's complaint is handled immediately—such as changing a room, fixing a facility issue, or offering compensation—it creates a positive impression that the establishment takes accountability seriously. This kind of immediate attention not only resolves the issue faster but also strengthens guest trust and confidence in the brand's reliability.

In the long run, maintaining high responsiveness in complaint handling helps build guest loyalty and enhances the hotel's reputation. Guests who experience fast and efficient responses are more likely to return and recommend the property to others. To achieve this, hotels should empower employees to make on-the-spot decisions, provide adequate training, and implement clear procedures for handling complaints promptly. By fostering a culture of responsiveness, hospitality organizations can turn service failures into opportunities for service recovery and guest satisfaction improvement.

H₃ : Gender significantly moderates the relationship between the responsiveness variable and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels

Reliability

The effectiveness of guest complaint handling using the variable of reliability is determined by how consistently and accurately hotel employees deliver on their promises when resolving guest issues. Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and correctly. When hotel staff handle complaints in a consistent, fair, and dependable manner, guests perceive the organization as trustworthy and professional. This dependability creates confidence that the hotel is capable of providing not only high-quality service but also effective problem resolution whenever issues arise.

Furthermore, reliability ensures that guests experience a sense of assurance and fairness throughout the complaint handling process. A reliable response means that employees follow through on commitments—such as correcting billing errors, replacing faulty amenities, or ensuring that promised compensations are delivered promptly. When these actions are carried out as promised, guests feel that the hotel respects their time and values their satisfaction. This consistency strengthens the guest's perception that the establishment is dependable, even when mistakes occur.

In the broader context, reliability in handling complaints contributes to long-term guest loyalty and organizational credibility. Guests who see that their concerns are managed accurately and consistently are more likely to return and share positive feedback about their experience. Therefore, enhancing reliability involves standardizing service recovery procedures, training staff to handle complaints systematically, and monitoring performance to ensure consistent follow-up. By embedding reliability into complaint handling practices, hotels can transform service recovery into a powerful driver of guest satisfaction and trust.

H₃₄ : Gender significantly moderates the relationship between the reliability variable and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels

Research Framework

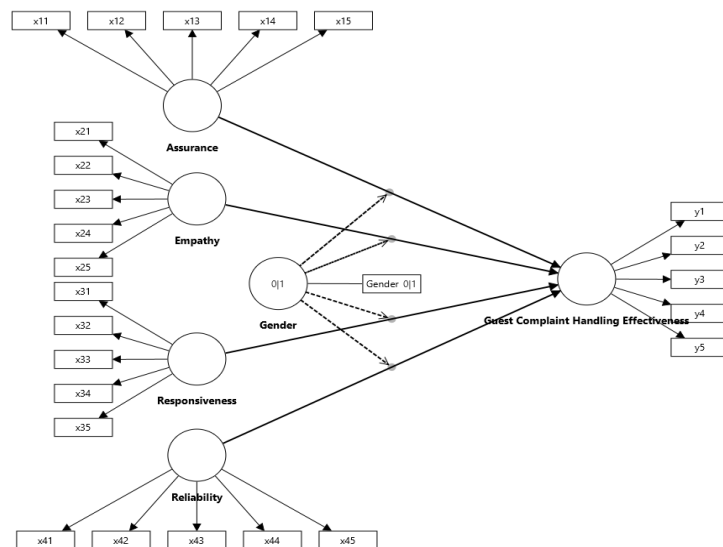


Figure 1. Research Frameworks

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method to examine guests' perceptions of gender issues in the effectiveness of complaint handling at budget hotels. In this study, gender is operationalized as a categorical variable reflecting respondents' self-identified gender, typically coded as *1 = male* and *2 = female*. It represents socially constructed roles and expectations rather than purely biological differences. Based on Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) in (Cockburn-Wooten, 2012) men and women may evaluate complaint handling differently because of culturally shaped norms in Indonesia's hospitality context. Male guests often emphasize responsiveness and efficiency, while female guests value assurance and empathy. Thus, gender functions as a social-psychological moderator influencing how service quality dimensions relate to complaint handling effectiveness.

The population of the study consists of hotel guests who have directly submitted complaints during their stay at budget hotels in the city of Batam. The sample is selected purposively based on the criteria of guests who have experience lodging complaints with hotel staff, both male and female. The minimum length of stay is two nights and three days (2N3D), and respondents' ages range from over 19 years old to a maximum of 65 years old. The number of respondents is determined using the Slovin formula (Sugiyono, 2015)

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N * e^2)}$$

With a research scope spanning six months of data collection, the identified population consisted of 400 individuals. Using a margin of error of 5%, the resulting sample size was calculated to be approximately 200 respondents, after screening process the respondent were collected 182 sample. The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale designed to measure guest perceptions of service quality attributes, including assurance, empathy, responsiveness and, reliability.

Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining the influence of gender on the effectiveness of complaint handling services in hotels through structural equation modeling (SEM) using Smart Partial Least Squares (Smart PLS).

4. Empirical Findings/Result

Summary of Respondents' Description. The summary of the respondents' description is as follows. Female respondents totaled 74 (40.7%), while male respondents totaled 108 (59.3%). In terms of age, respondents aged between 18 and 28 years numbered 48 (26.4%), those aged between 29 and 39 years totaled 88 (48.4%), and those over 40 years old totaled 46 (25.3%). Regarding education level, 32 respondents (17.6%) had completed senior high school, 29 respondents (15.9%) held a diploma (D3), 83 respondents (45.6%) held a bachelor's degree, and 38 respondents (20.9%) held a postgraduate degree.

The validity of the items or instruments used was tested through several measurements, including loading factor, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results of each test are presented in the table below.

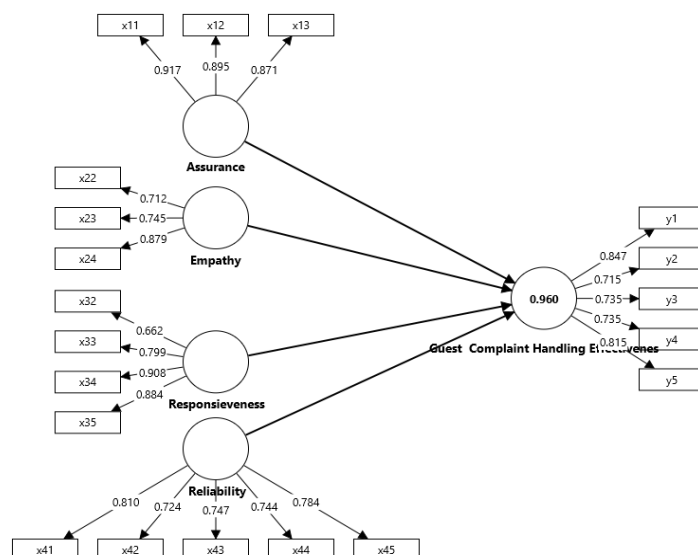


Figure 2. Loading Factors

After undergoing the screening test on the variables of assurance, empathy, responsiveness, reliability, and guest complaint handling effectiveness, the indicators consisting of 25 items across all variables were declared valid after reducing items x1.4, x1.5, x2.1, x2.5, and x3.1. There are 20 indicators within the variables that have loading factor values above 0.60 (Chin, 2013) in (Arenhart et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the results of the Composite Reliability test to verify the validity and reliability are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Assurance	0.812	0.826	0.869	0.571
Empathy	0.794	0.811	0.860	0.556
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.923	0.924	0.942	0.766
Reliability	0.827	0.858	0.875	0.584
Responsiveness	0.849	0.853	0.892	0.623

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that all latent variables exhibit Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding the threshold of 0.70, as recommended by Hair et al. (2013) in (Hinson et al., 2024). This finding confirms that all indicators associated with the measured variables demonstrate satisfactory reliability. In this study, the CR values range from 0.860 to 0.942, while values range from 0.811 to 0.924, all exceeding the recommended threshold. These results confirm that all five constructs — *Assurance*, *Empathy*, *Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness*, *Reliability*, and *Responsiveness* — exhibit strong internal consistency, implying that their indicators are stable and cohesive in representing the underlying construct

Furthermore, the results of the Cronbach's Alpha analysis, which also serves as an indicator of internal consistency, are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Assurance	0.812	0.826	0.869	0.571
Empathy	0.794	0.811	0.860	0.556
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.923	0.924	0.942	0.766

Reliability	0.827	0.858	0.875	0.584
Responsiveness	0.849	0.853	0.892	0.623

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Furthermore, **Table 2** shows that all indicators representing the latent variables also have **Cronbach's Alpha** values exceeding 0.70 Hair et al. (2013) in (Cockburn-Wooten, 2012). An alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.794 to 0.923, demonstrating that the items measuring each dimension of service quality and complaint handling are internally reliable. The highest alpha value was observed for *Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness* ($\alpha = 0.923$), indicating exceptionally strong reliability, while other constructs also fall within a satisfactory range. These results confirm that all measurement items are reliable and consistently capture their intended concepts.

This finding further supports the reliability of the instrument, confirming that the internal consistency of each variable is acceptable. To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were examined. The results of this analysis are presented in the following table and indicate the extent to which the indicators explain the variance of the underlying construct.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho a)	Composite reliability (rho c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Assurance	0.812	0.826	0.869	0.571
Empathy	0.794	0.811	0.860	0.556
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.923	0.924	0.942	0.766
Reliability	0.827	0.858	0.875	0.584
Responsiveness	0.849	0.853	0.892	0.623

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Based on Table 3, it can be explained that all indicators representing the latent variables have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50, as suggested by Hair (2013) in (Hinson et al., 2024). This indicates that all indicators possess good convergent validity. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), an AVE value of **0.50 or above** suggests adequate convergent validity, meaning that more than half of the variance in the indicators is captured by the construct rather than by measurement error. In this study, the AVE values range from **0.556 to 0.766**, meeting the required threshold for all constructs. This indicates that the indicators share a high proportion of variance and effectively represent their respective latent variables. The

highest AVE value belongs to *Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness* (0.766), showing strong convergent validity.

Meanwhile, the results of the **discriminant validity** test using the **Fornell-Larcker Criterion** can be explained as follows:

Table 4. Fornell Larcker Test

	Assurance	Empathy	Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	Reliability	Responsiv eness
Assurance	0.756				
Empathy	0.603	0.746			
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.434	0.520	0.875		
Reliability	0.464	0.638	0.720	0.764	
Responsiveness	0.460	0.746	0.596	0.724	0.789

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Based on Table 4, the acceptance criterion for the Fornell-Larcker test is met when the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlation with any other construct (Hair, 2013). The results indicate that the discriminant validity criteria are satisfied. Specifically, the square root of AVE for each variable is as follows:

- 1) Assurance: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.756$, which is greater than its correlations with other variables
- 2) Empathy: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.746$, greater than its correlations with other variables
- 3) Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.875$, greater than its correlations with other variables
- 4) Reliability: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.764$, greater than its correlations with other variables
- 5) Responsiveness: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.789$, greater than its correlations with other variables

Taken together, the results of Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE confirm that the measurement model in this study demonstrates excellent reliability and convergent validity. The constructs are well-defined, and their indicators consistently measure the same underlying concepts. These findings ensure that the structural model analysis can be conducted with confidence, as the measurement model provides a sound empirical foundation for examining the relationships among service quality dimensions and complaint handling effectiveness.

These results demonstrate that discriminant validity, as assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, is well established. Furthermore, the results of discriminant validity testing using the **Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)** are presented in the following table:

Table 5. HTMT Test

	Assurance	Empathy	Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	Reliability	Responsive ness
Assurance					
Empathy	0.795				
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.489	0.604			
Reliability	0.562	0.796	0.888		
Responsiveness	0.542	0.888	0.664	0.871	

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Based on Table 5, the acceptance criterion for the HTMT test is fulfilled when the HTMT value is less than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019) in (Arenhart et al., 2023). The results indicate that all HTMT values are below the 0.90 threshold, thereby confirming that discriminant validity through the HTMT approach is satisfactorily met

Model Fit

Table 6 R Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.679	0.667

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Table 7 above illustrates the amount of variation in the endogenous variable that can be explained by the influence of the variables assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability, which amounts to 0.679. This effect size is considered moderate. This figure indicates an increase in the moderating effect, but it remains within the moderate category, as suggested by Chin (1998) in (Abnur et al., 2023).

Based on the data analysis results, it can be explained that the combined contribution of the variables assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability accounts for 67.9% of the variance in the endogenous variable, while the remaining 32.1% is attributed to other exogenous/endogenous variables outside the scope of this study.

Table 7. SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.094	0.094
NFI	0.814	0.814

Sources: Data Processing 2025

SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) is a model fit index that measures the difference between the observed correlation matrix and the model-implied

correlation matrix. The SRMR value obtained from the results above is 0.094, which falls within the range of 0.08 to 0.10. This indicates that the model has an acceptable fit, meaning the empirical data adequately explains the relationships among the variables in the model (Karin Schmellehe, et al., 2003) in (Shahril & Aziz, 2022)

NFI (Normed Fit Index) measures how well the structural model represents the data. The NFI value obtained is 0.814, which lies within the range of 0.80 to 0.89. This value is considered to indicate a moderately good or acceptable fit (Anda et al., 2020) In-depth discussion on the topic above will be elaborated on the below topic:

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant relationships between gender issues and their impact on guest complaint handling effectiveness in budget hotels within tourism industry. The depth discussion will be elaborated on these :



Figure 3. Slope Gender x Assurance

The figure above illustrates that gender moderates the relationship between assurance and guest complaint handling effectiveness. The female group (represented by the green line) tends to have a stronger moderating effect on guest complaint handling effectiveness compared to the male group (represented by the red line). This finding demonstrates a difference in guest complaint handling effectiveness from the perspective of assurance. This result is consistent with the findings of previous research (Antara et al., 2019), (Cockburn-Wooten, 2012)

Meanwhile, the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between empathy and guest complaint handling effectiveness can be described as follows:

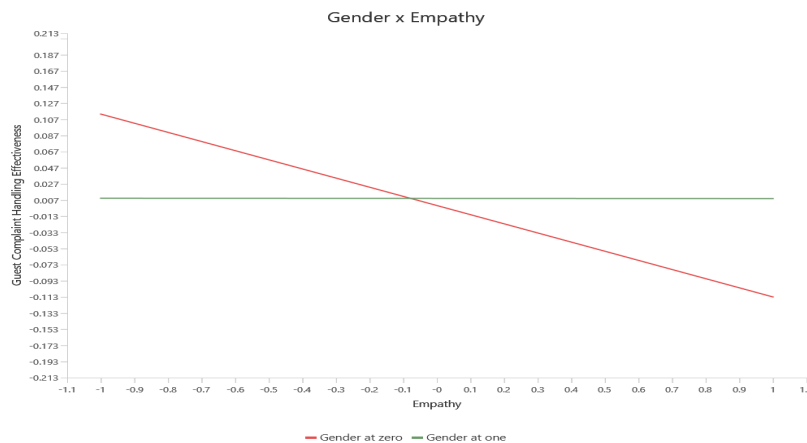


Figure 4. Slope Gender x Empathy

The figure above shows that gender moderates the relationship between empathy and guest complaint handling effectiveness. The female group (green line) tends to exhibit a more flat or smooth moderating effect on the level of guest complaint handling effectiveness compared to the male group (red line). This indicates a difference in guest complaint handling effectiveness from the perspective of empathy. This finding aligns with previous research (Shantika, 2024) and (Febriana & Ervina, 2023).

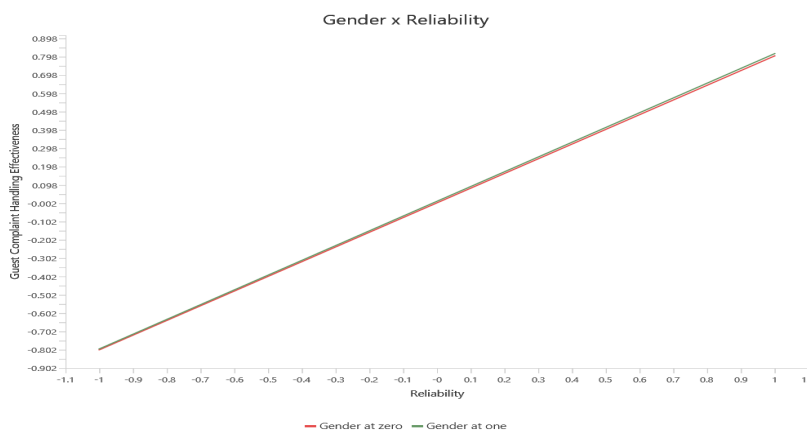


Figure 5. Slope Gender x Reliability

The figure above shows that gender does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between reliability and guest complaint handling effectiveness. Both the female group (green line) and the male group (red line) tend to have similar effects and do not show significant differences in guest complaint handling effectiveness from the perspective of reliability. This finding is consistent with previous research (Budhiartha, I Nyoman:Wibowo, 2025) and (Wibowo, A.E., Abnur, 2022) and (Febriani et al., 2023)

Meanwhile, the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between responsiveness and guest complaint handling effectiveness can be described as follows

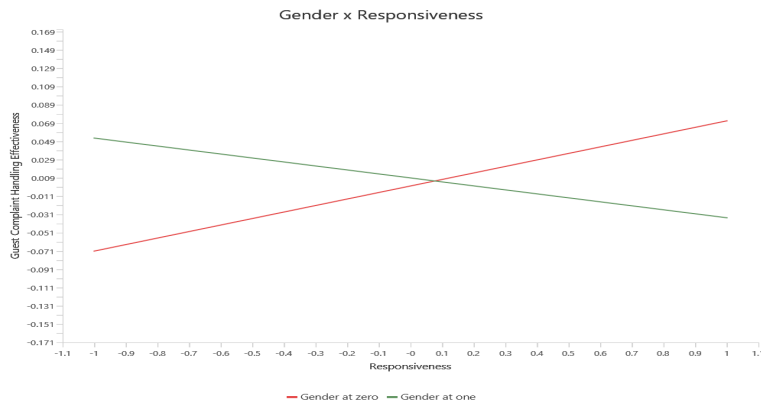


Figure 6. Slope Gender x Responsiveness

The figure above illustrates that gender moderates the relationship between responsiveness and guest complaint handling effectiveness. The female group (represented by the green line) tends to have a lower moderating effect on guest complaint handling effectiveness compared to the male group (represented by the red line). This finding demonstrates a difference in guest complaint handling effectiveness from the perspective of responsiveness. This result is consistent with the findings of previous research (Al-Rousan & Abuamoud, 2013)(Al-Rousan & Abuamoud, 2013), (Kasongo, 2023).

Hypotheses test

Table 8 Hypotheses test

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Gender x Assurance -> Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.132	2.985	0.009
Gender x Empathy -> Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	-0.255	2.924	0.003
Gender x Responsiveness -> Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.115	1.249	0.212
Gender x Reliability -> Guest Complaint Handling Effectiveness	0.153	1.968	0.049

Sources: Data Processing 2025

Based on Table 6, it can be explained that gender does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between assurance and guest complaint handling effectiveness, as indicated by a p-value of 0.98 (> 0.05). However, gender does moderate the

relationship between empathy and guest complaint handling effectiveness, with a p-value of 0.003 (< 0.05). Furthermore, gender does not moderate the relationship between responsiveness and guest complaint handling effectiveness, as shown by a p-value of 0.212 (> 0.05). Finally, gender is found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between reliability and guest complaint handling effectiveness, with a p-value of 0.049 (< 0.05).

Differentiated complaint-resolution strategies and communication protocols based on guest profiles can be designed by positioning gender as a strategic lens in service management. For instance, hotel staff may adopt empathy-driven communication for female guests, emphasizing emotional connection, reassurance, and active listening, while applying solution-oriented and efficiency-focused approaches for male guests who may value promptness and clarity. Training programs can also integrate gender-sensitive interaction scripts, ensuring that employees adjust tone, language, and response style according to guest preferences. Moreover, incorporating personalization technologies and guest profiling systems allows hotels to anticipate communication expectations and tailor complaint-handling methods—ultimately enhancing satisfaction, trust, and service recovery outcomes across gender segments.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that there are differences in the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between empathy and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels in Batam City. The analysis reveals that female employees tend to demonstrate higher levels of empathy compared to male employees, which positively influences the effectiveness of handling guest complaints. This indicates that gender plays a significant role in strengthening or weakening the impact of empathy on service performance in complaint resolution.

In addition, the study finds that the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between reliability and the effectiveness of complaint handling also shows a significant difference. Male employees tend to be more dominant in demonstrating reliability in consistently and timely executing complaint handling procedures, which contributes to the overall effectiveness. In other words, gender influences how reliability is translated into actual service practices for guests.

Based on the analysis results, it was found that gender does not play a significant moderating role in the relationship between assurance and the effectiveness of guest complaint handling in budget hotels in Batam City. This means that the level of confidence and sense of security conveyed by employees to guests—whether delivered by male or female staff—does not show a meaningful difference in influencing the success of complaint resolution. This indicates that assurance tends to be independent of gender in the context of service delivery in budget hotels.

Similarly, gender was not found to moderate the relationship between responsiveness and the effectiveness of complaint handling. A quick and attentive response to guest

complaints has a positive impact on handling effectiveness; however, this effect is not influenced by whether the employee is male or female. In other words, both male and female employees have equal potential in responding to complaints effectively, with no significant differences related to gender.

These findings provide important implications for the management of budget hotels in Batam City in designing strategies to improve service quality. By understanding that gender moderates the impact of empathy and reliability on complaint handling effectiveness, management can develop training tailored to the strengths of each gender and strategically assign staff to maximize service potential. This study also opens opportunities for further research to explore other factors that interact with gender in the context of hospitality service.

The findings also reveal that gender moderates the link between reliability and complaint-handling effectiveness, with male employees showing stronger reliability in consistently executing complaint-handling procedures. This pattern reflects traditional Indonesian values that associate men with decisiveness, responsibility, and procedural discipline. Such traits are culturally perceived as essential for maintaining trust and professionalism in service interactions. Meanwhile, assurance and responsiveness appear to be gender-neutral dimensions, as both male and female employees are expected to convey confidence, attentiveness, and politeness (*ramah tamah*) in line with Indonesia's collectivist and courteous hospitality norms

Overall, these results indicate that gender-related behavioral tendencies are evident in empathy and reliability, but service values rooted in Indonesian culture—such as harmony and collective responsibility—transcend gender differences. Hotel management can apply these insights by designing gender-sensitive training programs that enhance empathetic communication and reliable performance, while maintaining Indonesia's hallmark service culture of warmth and respect. Future research should further explore how cultural expectations, emotional intelligence, and gender interact to shape guest experiences in Indonesia's evolving hospitality landscape

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