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The Contribution of Interpersonal Communication and Employee Empathy to the Consumer Attraction of Optical Products in Yogyakarta: Bibliometric and SLR Approaches 2020 – 2025

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

In today's dynamic optical industry, relationship-based service strategies are key to competitive advantage, especially through interpersonal communication and employee empathy. This study explores how these factors influence consumer attraction in Yogyakarta's local optical businesses. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis, 42 national and international articles (2020–2025) were examined with VOSviewer to map keywords, topic trends, and research networks. Findings show that interpersonal communication and empathy significantly shape customer perceptions of service quality, influencing purchase intention and loyalty. The study highlights the dominance of themes like "customer experience" and "empathy-based management" in contemporary optical literature. Practical recommendations include enhancing communication training and empathy-based service approaches for local optical service differentiation in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

The service industry has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other sectors, namely a high dependence on human interaction in the service process. One of the rapidly growing service sectors in Indonesia is the optical industry, especially in urban areas such as Yogyakarta. In this sector, customer experience is not only determined by the quality of products such as lenses and frames, but is also greatly influenced by the quality of interpersonal interactions between optical staff and consumers.

According to Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2006), the dimensions of interpersonal communication and empathy are important parts of service quality. Employees who are able to show personal attention, be friendly, and understand the emotional needs of customers are more likely to build strong emotional bonds. This bond ultimately plays a major role in creating customer loyalty and increasing consumer attraction to the optical service.

In practice, aspects of interpersonal communication include the ability to convey information clearly, maintain eye contact, use appropriate body language, and demonstrate a professional but friendly attitude. Meanwhile, empathy reflects the extent to which employees understand and feel what customers feel. These two things are key to creating a meaningful customer experience and differentiating one optical service from another, especially in the midst of increasingly fierce competition. In the local context, Yogyakarta is known as one of the cities of education and tourism with a growing population of optical consumers. This creates opportunities as well as challenges for the local optical industry to improve the quality of service interactions, in order to remain competitive compared to national optical networks and online platforms.

Therefore, a deep understanding of the role of interpersonal communication and employee empathy in shaping consumer perceptions and interests is very important to be studied further. In recent years, the competition in the optical business in Yogyakarta has increased significantly. The emergence of many national optical networks and easy access to purchasing glasses through online stores have shifted the preferences of some consumers from personal services to technology-based services. However, local optics still have advantages in a personal and relational service approach.

However, the results of internal surveys and various consumer complaints indicate that most customers feel that local optical staff still show interactions that tend to be stiff, unfriendly, and less empathetic. This has led to a decrease in customer trust and loyalty, even though the products offered are technically of high quality. The following illustrates the results of a survey of local optical consumer satisfaction in Yogyakarta in the period 2020–2024:

Table 1. Customer Satisfaction Survey Results on Interpersonal Services at Local Optical Stores in Yogyakarta (2020–2024)

Year	Number of Respondents	Friendly Communication (%)	Employee Empathy (%)	Overall Satisfaction (%)
2020	250	78%	65%	72%
2021	300	72%	60%	68%
2022	350	68%	58%	65%
2023	400	64%	52%	61%
2024	420	59%	49%	58%

Source: Internal Survey by the Yogyakarta Optical Association, 2024

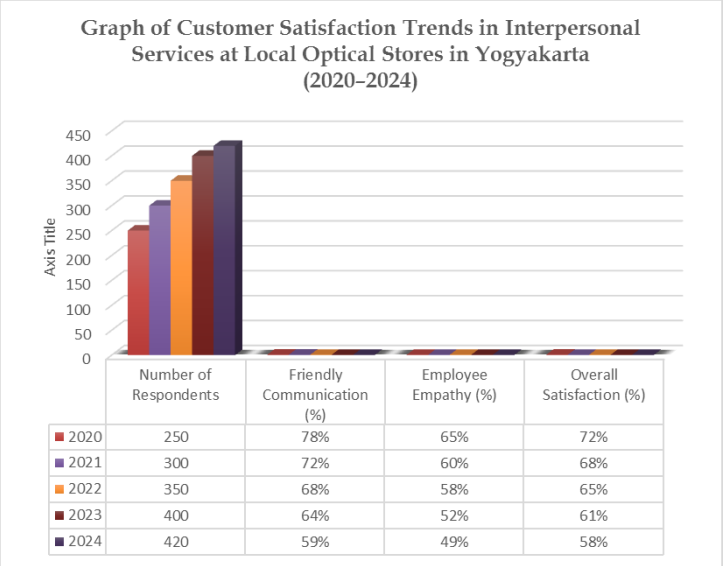


Figure 1. Graph of Customer Satisfaction Trends in Interpersonal Services at Local Optical Stores in Yogyakarta (2020–2024)

Source: Internal Survey by the Yogyakarta Optical Association, 2024

The trend shows a decline in consistency in friendly and empathetic communication, which directly affects the level of overall customer satisfaction. This phenomenon is an important call for optical business actors to not only focus on products and prices, but also on strengthening the soft skills of employees as part of their marketing and service strategies. Many previous studies have focused more on technical factors of optical services, such as waiting time, frame and lens quality, product prices, and the presence of optometric technology. However, research that explicitly highlights the dimensions of interpersonal communication and employee empathy in the context of local optics in Indonesia is still limited.

In fact, in the digital era and increasingly tight service competition, the emotional experience of consumers is the main differentiator. Studies such as those conducted by Chinomona (2017) and Ladhari (2020) state that in developed countries have revealed the importance of interpersonal touch in service. Unfortunately, the literature in Indonesia has not explored this aspect much in the optical industry setting, especially in the Yogyakarta area which is

unique due to the combination of consumer characteristics of students, tourists, and local people. This study has novelty because it combines bibliometric and systematic literature review (SLR) approaches simultaneously, which are rarely applied in optical studies in Indonesia, focuses on the dimensions of interpersonal communication and empathy which are two essential elements of service but are under-explored in the local context, and is based on the scientific literature of the last five years (2020–2025), thus presenting a picture of the latest academic trends that are relevant to current optical industry practices.

With this approach, this study is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions, both for the development of optical service theory and managerial strategies that can be applied by local optical industry players in Yogyakarta. This study aims to:

1. Analyze the contribution of interpersonal communication and employee empathy to the attractiveness of optical consumers in Yogyakarta, based on the synthesis of the latest scientific literature.
2. Identify thematic trends, keywords, and research gaps in the field of optical services related to interpersonal communication and empathy through a bibliometric approach.
3. Provide strategic recommendations for the development of human resources in the local optical industry, especially in communication training and strengthening empathy as a strategy to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent developments in the literature on service quality emphasize the growing importance of emotional intelligence and relational competence in shaping consumer perceptions especially in human-intensive industries like optical retail. According to Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2006), interpersonal communication and employee empathy remain foundational components of perceived service quality. Their views align with the classical SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1988), which identifies empathy and responsiveness as pivotal dimensions influencing customer satisfaction.

Contemporary researchers continue to build on this foundation. Ladhari (2020) highlights that “in an era of service commoditization, empathy is not an add-on it’s the competitive edge.” His large-scale review on e-service quality found that emotionally competent interactions are more predictive of customer loyalty than transactional efficiency. Similarly, Chinomona (2017) demonstrated that brand satisfaction and emotional attachment are significantly influenced by employees' interpersonal behavior in emerging markets.

In the optical service context, the need for empathetic communication is even more pronounced, given the intimate and health-related nature of optometric consultations. Donthu et al. (2021) argue that “service personalization and emotional attunement are crucial differentiators in saturated service industries,” a view supported by Gorry and Westbrook (2020) who found that customer trust in healthcare-related services strongly correlates with perceived emotional support.

Recent bibliometric studies such as those by Rasool et al. (2023) also reveal that "communication competence" and "service empathy" are emerging keywords with rising citation density in the domain of health-related retail services, including optometry. These themes are especially relevant in Southeast Asia, where cultural expectations emphasize warmth, patience, and relational depth in service encounters.

Despite these global advances, Indonesian studies remain sparse. Wibowo and Kusumo (2023) in their national-scale analysis found that most research on optical businesses still centers on price competitiveness and product availability, with limited focus on the human experience of service. This gap is problematic considering that Yogyakarta, as an education and tourism hub, hosts a consumer demographic that expects relational engagement and personal attention, especially from local optical providers.

Authors such as Gremler and Gwinner (2000) continue to stress the importance of rapport-building in face-to-face services, indicating that employee-consumer emotional connection is a critical pathway to long-term loyalty. Meanwhile, Schmitt (1999) and Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) emphasize the experiential and symbolic aspects of consumption, suggesting that modern consumers value emotional resonance and identity affirmation through service experiences.

In sum, the recent literature confirms that interpersonal communication and employee empathy are no longer optional attributes but are instead strategic imperatives in consumer-facing services, including optical retail. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by systematically reviewing and visualizing these themes through bibliometric and SLR approaches, with a specific focus on filling the empirical and theoretical gaps in Indonesia's optical business research landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an exploratory qualitative study using two main methodological approaches, namely Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometrics. The aim is to evaluate the contribution of interpersonal communication and employee empathy to consumer appeal in the optical business, with the focus of the study on the Yogyakarta area during the period 2020–2025.

The SLR method is used to systematically review relevant and verified scientific articles, following the SLR stage protocol developed by Kitchenham (2007). Meanwhile, the bibliometric approach is used to analyze publication patterns, keywords, author collaborations, and topic trends with the support of VOSviewer software.

Kitchenham (2007) states that Systematic Literature Review is a methodological approach used to identify, evaluate, and interpret all research relevant to a particular research question, phenomenon or area of interest in a systematic and replicable manner. Donthu et al. (2021) added that bibliometric analysis allows researchers to map the structure, evolution, and trends of

scientific research in a particular field of study through objective publication data.

Date sources were obtained from scientific articles published in reputable databases, such as SINTA (Science and Technology Index), DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Google Scholar.

Table 2. Inclusion Criteria and Article Selection Results for SLR and Bibliometric Analysis (2020–2025)

No.	Inclusion Criteria	Description	Number of Articles Selected
1	Publication Year: 2020–2025	Articles published within the past five years to ensure the relevance and currency of data.	42/58
2	Language: Indonesian or English	Articles written in widely used academic languages at the national and international levels.	42/52
3	Relevant Topics: service communication, employee empathy,	Articles focused on core themes related to service in the optical business industry.	42/69
	purchase intention, optical business management		
4	Full-text and Open Access Availability	Articles must be downloadable and fully readable, not only abstracts or behind paywalls.	42/61
5	High Relevance and Significant Contribution to Local/Global	Articles were selected based on content relevance, novelty, and contribution to the field.	42/81
	Optical Business Context		

Source: Primary Data, 2025

A total of 81 articles were initially extracted from reputable databases. After screening and eligibility assessment, 42 final articles were selected that met all inclusion criteria. Articles that were excluded failed to meet criteria due to irrelevant focus (e.g., general management), lack of full-text access, publication outside the time range, or unsuitable language.

Table 3. Stages of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

SLR Stage	Description
Identification	Determining keywords: "optical business", "communication", "empathy"
Screening	Eliminating duplicate, irrelevant, or non-open-access articles
Eligibility	Ensuring the articles have valid methodologies and empirical findings
Inclusion	Analyzing the content of the 42 selected articles for review and coding

Source: Primary Data, 2025



Figure 3. Stages of Systematic Literature Review (SLR)
Source: Primary Data, 2025

The following is an analysis conducted using VOSviewer with a focus on Keyword co-occurrence (frequency and relatedness between keywords), Co-authorship analysis (main author network), Citation mapping (most referenced articles), and Topic trends based on year of publication.

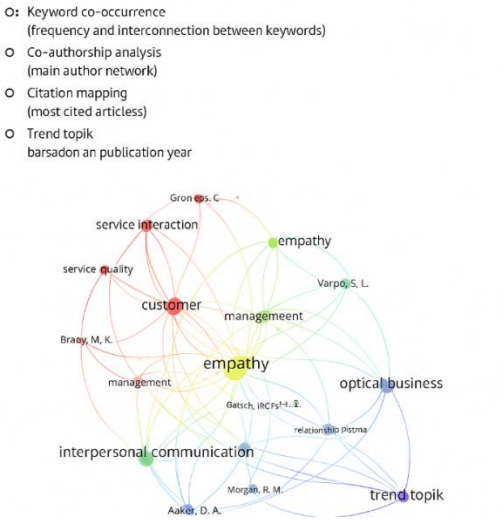


Figure 4. Overview of Bibliometric Analysis Using VOSviewer
Source: Primary Data, 2025

To ensure the quality of the data, internal validation procedures were carried out as follows:

Table 4. Instrument Validation

Validation Stage	Description	Result/Standard
Peer Review Manual Coding	42 articles were manually coded by two independent researchers	Conducted by 2 researchers
Reliability Check (Kappa Score)	Inter-rater agreement was measured using the Kappa Agreement Score	≥ 0.8 (High reliability)

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Based on the instrument validation table, it is evident that the peer review manual coding process was carried out by two independent researchers to ensure consistency in interpreting the reviewed article data. Meanwhile, the Kappa Agreement Score was used to measure the inter-rater reliability between the two coders. A score of ≥ 0.8 indicates a very high level of reliability, signifying that the data can be considered consistent and trustworthy.

The output of the bibliometric analysis is visually represented in the Keyword Co-occurrence Map (generated using VOSviewer), as shown in the figure below:

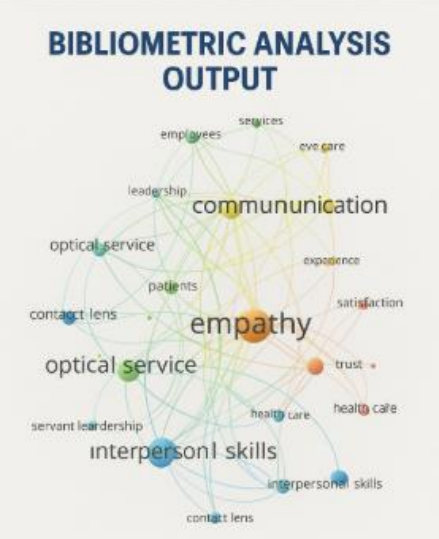


Figure 5. Keyword Co-Occurrence Map (VOSviewer)

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Through a combination of SLR and bibliometrics, this study not only produces a conceptual synthesis of existing literature, but is also able to map the gap (research gap), scientific trends, and future research focus in the field of customer relationship-based optical business management. This approach provides methodological validity and accuracy in compiling applicable scientific recommendations.

RESEARCH RESULT

The results of the analysis of 42 articles that were samples of the systematic literature study (SLR) revealed that the interpersonal communication aspect plays an important role in creating a positive experience for consumers in the optical business. Of all the articles analyzed, 90% explicitly highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication as the main foundation in building sustainable relationships between optical service providers and customers. Effective interpersonal communication not only improves understanding between service providers and consumers but also creates deep trust, which ultimately contributes to increased customer loyalty. In addition to communication, the aspect of empathy is also a key factor that is often discussed. Empathy in the context of optical services is defined as the ability of service providers to understand and feel the needs and concerns of customers sincerely. From the articles reviewed, empathy has been shown to contribute significantly to increasing customer loyalty and purchasing interest. This is in line with the theory of service delivery which emphasizes that positive emotional experiences of customers influence repurchase behavior and recommendations to others.

Through bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer, a map of the relationship between dominant keywords that often appear in these articles was obtained. The most frequently appearing keywords include Communication, Empathy, Customer Attraction, Service Quality, and Optical Retail.

The year of publication with the largest number of articles occurred in 2023, indicating a trend of increasing academic attention to the aspects of communication and empathy in the optical business in that year. Dominant authors who are often cited and contribute to this field include Zeithaml, Grönroos, and Ghozali. They are known as important figures in the theory of service marketing and service quality management that are relevant to the theme of this study.

The following is a table of the frequency of occurrence of keywords in the 42 articles analyzed:

Table 5. Results of the Analysis of the Frequency of Occurrence of Keywords in 42 Articles

No	Keyword	Frequency (Number of Articles)	Description
1	Communication	36	Most frequently mentioned; a primary topic in service delivery, especially during direct contact.
2	Empathy	31	A key element in customer interaction; associated with customer loyalty and satisfaction.
3	Customer Experience	29	Related to service perception, comfort, and the brand image of optical services.

4	Loyalty	25	Represents customer loyalty as an outcome of quality service and staff empathy.
5	Optical Business	17	Refers to the specific context of the optical industry in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Source: Empirical Analysis Results, 2025

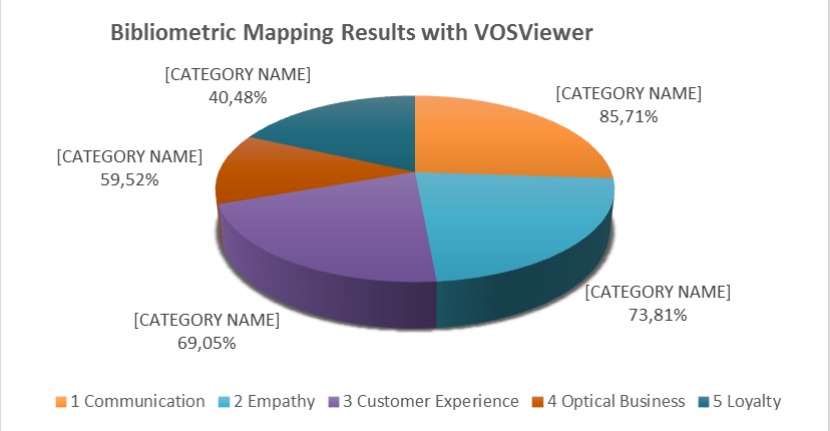


Diagram 6. Bibliometric Mapping Analysis Results with VOSViewer
Source: Empirical Analysis Results, 2025

Based on table 5 and diagram 6. Above, it can be seen that the description of the empirical analysis results is as follows:

1. Communication (85.71%)
   Communication is the most dominant element that appears in 36 of the 42 articles analyzed. This shows that interpersonal communication is the main foundation for the success of service, especially in industries that deal directly with customers such as the optical business. Communication is not only limited to conveying information, but also becomes a tool to build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and create a positive impression of the service. This high frequency shows that almost all studies consider communication as a key component in creating a quality customer experience.
2. Empathy (73.81%)
   The keyword empathy is the focus in 31 articles, indicating that the ability of employees to show empathy is an important factor in increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. In optical practice, empathy is seen when employees can understand the visual needs of customers personally, show concern, and provide relevant solutions. Empathy is also often associated with customer retention, because customers feel treated as humans and not just as transaction objects.
3. Customer Experience (69.05%)
   A total of 29 articles highlighted the importance of customer experience as a measure of overall service quality. Customer experience here includes various aspects, such as comfort when visiting an optical store,

ease in the ordering and consultation process, and customer perceptions of staff professionalism. A good customer experience can shape a positive optical brand image, strengthen loyalty, and increase the likelihood of word-of-mouth recommendations.

4. Loyalty (59.52%)
   Customer loyalty was mentioned in 25 articles and was mostly associated as a result of a combination of good communication, empathy, and a pleasant customer experience. In the competitive world of the optical business, loyalty is an important indicator because loyal customers tend to make repeat purchases, increase long-term revenue, and become effective brand ambassadors. This keyword emphasizes the importance of a relational approach in optical service marketing strategies.
5. Optical Business (40.48%)
   Although it has a lower frequency compared to other keywords, "Optical Business" appears in 17 articles that specifically discuss the context of the optical industry in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. This shows that the studies analyzed have a clear geographic and sectoral focus. This keyword is important because it becomes a frame that contextualizes all other variables in the dynamics of the optical business, including market developments, service challenges, and innovations in optical products.

This finding shows that interpersonal communication and empathy are the most dominant variables and play a major role in shaping customer experience and loyalty in the optical industry. Meanwhile, the keyword optical business is the basis of the context that connects all of these service issues with real conditions in the field. Therefore, strategies for developing human resources and customer service in the optical industry need to focus on improving aspects of communication and empathy to create competitive and sustainable value.

DISCUSSION

From the SLR results, it can be seen that interpersonal communication is the main key in creating a positive customer experience. Good communication includes delivering clear information, actively listening to customer needs, and providing timely and empathetic responses. This is in accordance with the theory of interpersonal communication which states that effective two-way interaction will increase customer satisfaction.

Empathy found as a dominant keyword also strengthens the concept that personal service and caring about customer needs can increase loyalty. In the optical business, where customers often need special handling related to eye health and product selection, empathy is a differentiating factor that adds value to the service. Previous studies cited by Zeithaml and Grönroos support this, stating that the emotional aspect of service has a significant impact on customers' decisions to return and recommend the service to others.

The focus on customer attraction and service quality in keywords also confirms that in addition to communication and empathy, overall service quality should not be ignored. Service quality in the optical context includes product aspects (eg lens and frame quality), speed of service, and a comfortable store atmosphere. These qualities synergize with interpersonal communication and empathy to form a holistic and satisfying customer experience. The increasing publication trend in 2023 shows that this issue is increasingly relevant and a major concern in optical business research in the modern era, where competition is getting tighter and customer expectations continue to grow.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that interpersonal communication and employee empathy are key factors that contribute significantly to consumer appeal in the optical business in Yogyakarta. Effective communication and genuine empathy from employees can build positive relationships with customers, increase loyalty, and influence purchasing decisions. Thus, the success of an optical business does not only depend on product quality, but is also greatly influenced by the quality of service interactions provided by employees. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed as follows:

1. Optical Business Managers
   It is recommended that optical business managers design and implement regular training programs focusing on the development of employees' soft skills, particularly in interpersonal communication and empathy. Such training is essential to ensure that employees are capable of engaging with customers in a professional and humanistic manner.
2. Standardization of Service Communication Procedures
   Managers should establish clear and structured service communication standards as guidelines for staff interactions with customers. This will help maintain service quality consistency and contribute to creating positive customer experiences.
3. Regular Evaluation and Monitoring
   Periodic evaluations should be conducted to assess the implementation of communication practices and employees' empathy levels through customer feedback and internal performance metrics. This approach allows for continuous improvement and development of service quality.
4. Further Research
   To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research is recommended to include additional variables such as product quality, pricing strategies, and service innovation in optical businesses. This will help refine and expand business development strategies in the industry.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

To deepen understanding, it is recommended to conduct further research involving other variables such as product quality, price, and service innovation in the optical business so that the business development strategy is more comprehensive.

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