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Job Motivation as Mediator of Employee Competence and Performance in Sustainable Tourism Industry

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Abstract
Purpose: This study examines the relationship between employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance, with particular attention to the mediating role of job motivation in the hotel industry in Makassar, Indonesia.
Research Methodology: A survey-based quantitative design was employed using data from 149 active hotel employees. The data were collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using validity and reliability tests and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling.
Results: The findings reveal that employee competence has a positive and significant effect on both job motivation and employee performance. However, job motivation does not significantly affect employee performance and does not significantly mediate the relationship between employee competence and employee performance.
Conclusions: Employee competence is the most decisive predictor of employee performance in the hotel context. Although competence strengthens job motivation, motivation does not function as a significant intervening mechanism in the competence-performance relationship.
Limitations: This study is limited to hotel employees in Makassar, applies a cross-sectional design, and relies on self-reported questionnaire data.
Contributions: This study contributes to human resource management and hospitality literature by showing that competency development is more directly associated with employee performance than motivational mediation. Practically, the findings suggest that hotel managers should prioritise competency-based human resource strategies, including training, coaching, performance appraisal, and service capability development.

Keywords: *Employee Competence, Employee Performance, Job Motivation, Hotel Industry, Hospitality Management*

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1. Introduction

Human resources have long been recognised as one of the most strategic organisational assets because they play a central role in mobilising, coordinating, and transforming other organisational resources into productive outcomes (Jensen, Potočnik, & Chaudhry, 2020; Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016; McCarter, Haeruddin, Mustafa, Abadi, & Syahrul, 2022). In contemporary industrial and organisational settings, the effectiveness of human resources is closely associated with an organisation's ability to achieve sustainable performance, particularly through the development of employee competence, work

motivation, and performance-oriented behaviour (Haeruddin, Mpehle, Muhibah, Dipoatmodjo, & Natsir, 2022; Musa, Wardhana, & Haeruddin, 2018). Therefore, human resource management research continues to place significant attention on the factors that shape employee behaviour and determine organisational success.

Among the key constructs in this field, employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance remain central because of their strong theoretical and practical interrelationships. Employee competence refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and work-related capacities required to perform job responsibilities effectively. Employee performance, meanwhile, reflects the extent to which employees accomplish assigned tasks, meet organisational expectations, and contribute to organisational goals. Between these two constructs, job motivation occupies an important position because it explains the internal drive that encourages employees to use their competence productively in the workplace. Employees with higher motivation are generally more willing to exert effort, persist in completing work tasks, and apply their competencies more effectively, which may ultimately strengthen their performance (Natsir, Dipoatmodjo, Arjang, Hidayat, & Mustafa, 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2022).

Although prior studies have examined the direct relationships between employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance, the explanatory mechanism connecting these variables remains insufficiently developed. Existing research has generally confirmed that competence can improve performance and that motivation is associated with employee productivity. However, much of the literature still tends to treat these constructs as separate predictors rather than examining how they interact within a more integrated behavioural mechanism (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018; Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021; Purwanto, Purba, Bernarto, & Sijabat, 2021; Sulistio & Darmastuti, 2024). In particular, limited attention has been given to whether job motivation functions as a mediating mechanism through which employee competence is translated into stronger employee performance. This gap is important because competence alone may not automatically produce better performance. Employees may possess adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities, yet these capabilities may not result in optimal work outcomes if they are not supported by sufficient motivation to apply them consistently.

A further gap can be identified from the regional and contextual orientation of previous studies. Much of the existing literature on competence, motivation, and employee performance has been developed in broader organisational contexts, often outside Southeast Asia or without sufficient attention to the specific socio-cultural and managerial characteristics of this region. In Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia, empirical studies examining the mediating role of job motivation in the relationship between employee competence and employee performance remain relatively limited. This limitation is significant because employee behaviour is shaped not only by individual capability but also by contextual factors such as organisational culture, leadership practices, employment conditions, local work values, and managerial systems. Consequently, findings from other national or regional contexts may not be fully transferable to Indonesian organisations without further empirical verification.

The Indonesian context provides a relevant setting for examining this issue because organisations operate within dynamic labour conditions, diverse cultural values, and evolving managerial practices. In regions such as Makassar, South Sulawesi, organisations face increasing demands to improve employee capability while also maintaining motivation and performance in competitive work environments. However, the extent to which competent employees achieve higher performance through job motivation remains underexplored in this local context. This creates a specific empirical gap that needs to be addressed, particularly to enrich the understanding of human resource management practices in Indonesia and, more broadly, in Southeast Asia.

Recognizing these phenomena as well as the theoretical and contextual considerations, this study aims to examine the mediating role of job motivation in the relationship between employee competence and employee performance in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Theoretically, this study contributes to the human resource management literature by offering a more integrated explanation of how employee

competence influences performance through motivational mechanisms. Managerially, the study provides insights for organisations by highlighting that improving employee performance requires not only the development of employee competence but also the strengthening of job motivation. By addressing the limited empirical evidence from Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, this study is expected to enhance the contextual relevance of human resource management research and provide a clearer understanding of how employee competence can be transformed into improved performance through job motivation.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis/es Development

In line with the research gap discussed in the introduction, the relationship between employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance needs to be examined through a more integrated human resource management perspective. This issue is particularly relevant in labour-intensive service sectors such as tourism and hospitality, where organisational effectiveness is strongly determined by employees' capabilities, motivation, and behaviour during service delivery. In these sectors, employees are not merely operational resources but strategic actors who shape service quality, visitor experience, organisational resilience, and the implementation of sustainability-related practices (Kim & Baker, 2024; Li, Stamolampros, & Zhao, 2025; Näppä, Styvén, & Robertson, 2025; Saito, Brozović, & Baum, 2025).

Recent tourism and hospitality studies have increasingly highlighted sustainable employment, employee well-being, workforce resilience, and employee perceptions as essential dimensions of organisational sustainability (Kim & Baker, 2024; Näppä et al., 2025; Saito et al., 2025). However, although these studies provide valuable insights into employee-related issues, there remains a need for further empirical clarification regarding how individual competence is converted into actual performance through motivational mechanisms. This is especially important in Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts, where tourism and hospitality organisations operate within distinctive cultural, managerial, and labour-market conditions. Therefore, this study develops its hypotheses by positioning job motivation as a psychological mechanism that may explain how employee competence contributes to employee performance.

2.1 Employee Competence and Job Motivation

Employee competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, behavioural attributes, and work-related capacities that enable individuals to perform their job responsibilities effectively and contribute to organisational objectives. In human resource management literature, competence has been widely regarded as a strategic resource because it supports employee effectiveness, organisational adaptability, and long-term performance (Salman, Ganie, & Saleem, 2020). Recent studies also emphasise that capability development, training, employability skills, and transferable competencies are increasingly important in contemporary business and service environments (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018; Lou, So, & Hsieh, 2018; Promnil, Srepirote, & Pooprueksachat, 2024; Stangl, Li, Ma, Xu, & Alsaied, 2024).

In the tourism and hospitality industry, competence is particularly important because employees are required not only to complete technical tasks but also to communicate effectively, respond to customer needs, solve service problems, adapt to dynamic work situations, and maintain professional service behaviour. Recent hospitality research indicates that post-pandemic work settings require employees with broader competency profiles, including adaptability, interpersonal capability, service orientation, problem-solving, and digital readiness (Kurniawan, 2022; Promnil et al., 2024; Stangl et al., 2024). These competencies are essential because service quality often depends on employees' ability to respond quickly and appropriately during direct interactions with customers.

Competence is also theoretically related to job motivation. Employees who possess adequate knowledge and skills tend to feel more capable of managing work demands, achieving targets, and completing tasks successfully. This sense of capability may increase confidence, persistence, and willingness to invest effort in work activities. From a behavioural perspective, competence can strengthen job motivation because employees who believe they are capable of performing well are more likely to develop positive

work energy and stronger commitment to task accomplishment (Natsir et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2022). In hospitality settings, recent evidence further shows that work-related resources, supportive HR systems, and training opportunities can enhance employee motivation and engagement because they improve employees' capacity to perform effectively (Dorta-Afonso, González-de-la-Rosa, García-Rodríguez, & Romero-Domínguez, 2021). Therefore, competent employees are expected to demonstrate stronger job motivation.

H_1: Employee competence positively and significantly affects job motivation

2.2 Employee Competence and Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the extent to which employees fulfil job responsibilities and contribute to organisational objectives through productive, effective, and goal-oriented behaviour. In the literature, employee performance is commonly understood through several interrelated dimensions, including task performance, contextual performance, service quality, adaptability, teamwork, efficiency, and goal achievement (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018; McCarter et al., 2022). In tourism and hospitality organisations, performance is not limited to routine task completion. It also includes employees' ability to provide responsive service, manage customer complaints, collaborate with colleagues, maintain service standards, and support organisational goals under changing operational conditions.

Employee competence is one of the most important antecedents of employee performance. Competent employees are better able to apply knowledge, perform technical tasks, solve work-related problems, communicate with customers, and achieve both qualitative and quantitative performance targets. Salman et al. (2020) emphasise that competence plays a critical role in improving organisational performance, while Lou et al. (2018) show that development-oriented HR practices contribute to employee effectiveness. Similarly, Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2018) argue that work-related capabilities are important determinants of employee performance.

Recent hospitality studies further support the relevance of competence for employee performance. Hai and Park (2024) for example, highlight that role capability and workforce quality are important for improving employees' in-role and extra-role performance. Promnil et al. (2024) also emphasise the importance of employability and service-related skills in sustaining performance within the hospitality sector. These findings suggest that employees with stronger competence are more capable of meeting job requirements, maintaining service consistency, and contributing to organisational effectiveness. Therefore, higher employee competence is expected to lead to stronger employee performance.

H_2: Employee competence positively and significantly affects employee performance

2.3 Job Motivation and Employee Performance

Job motivation refers to the internal and external forces that encourage employees to initiate work effort, sustain persistence, and direct their behaviour toward organisational goals. Motivation is a central concept in organisational behaviour because it explains why employees choose to exert effort, maintain commitment, and perform tasks with responsibility and enthusiasm. In organisational contexts, job motivation is influenced by individual, psychological, and environmental factors, including communication quality, emotional conditions, work-life balance, recognition, leadership, and perceived support (Dodanwala & Shrestha, 2021; Sulistio & Darmastuti, 2024).

In service organisations, job motivation is especially important because employee performance often depends on discretionary effort. Hospitality and tourism employees are expected not only to perform formal tasks but also to demonstrate friendliness, responsiveness, emotional control, service recovery ability, and customer-oriented behaviour. These forms of performance require motivation because they depend on employees' willingness to invest energy beyond minimum job requirements. Motivated employees are more likely to show persistence, focus, responsibility, and proactive behaviour in completing their duties (Haeruddin, Natsir, Aswar, Aslam, & Salam, 2023).

Recent studies in hospitality and tourism strengthen this argument. Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021) show that motivation and engagement are shaped by work-related resources and HR practices, while (Benítez-Núñez, Dorta-Afonso, & de Saá-Pérez, 2024; Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021) indicate that employee

motivation is closely associated with positive work outcomes in hotel contexts. Ye and Chen (2024) also suggest that motivated frontline hospitality employees are more likely to remain connected to their work roles and maintain service performance. These studies indicate that motivation is not merely an individual psychological state but an important driver of performance-related behaviour. Therefore, employees with stronger job motivation are expected to perform better.

H_3: Job motivation positively and significantly affects employee performance

2.4 The Mediating Role of Job Motivation

Although employee competence is widely recognised as an important predictor of employee performance, the relationship between competence and performance may not always be direct or automatic. Competence explains what employees are able to do, but motivation explains whether employees are willing to use their abilities consistently, energetically, and effectively in the workplace. In other words, competent employees may possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities, but these capabilities may not produce optimal performance when they are not supported by sufficient motivation.

This argument is particularly relevant in tourism and hospitality organisations. Service work often involves emotional labour, customer interaction, teamwork, flexibility, and rapid problem-solving. These demands require employees not only to be competent but also to be motivated to apply their competence in real work situations. For example, an employee may understand service procedures and possess strong communication skills, but high performance will occur only when the employee is willing to use those skills consistently, respond positively to customers, and persist in completing service tasks. Thus, job motivation can be understood as the psychological bridge that transforms employee competence into observable performance.

The mediating role of job motivation is also supported by recent studies in hospitality and organisational behaviour. Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021) show that motivational processes help explain how job resources and HR practices influence employee engagement and performance-related outcomes. Ye and Chen (2024) further demonstrate that motivation can function as an important mechanism linking work-related factors with positive employee outcomes. These findings suggest that motivation does not merely operate as an independent predictor of performance but may also explain how other organisational or individual resources are translated into improved work behaviour.

Accordingly, within the competence-performance relationship, job motivation is expected to serve as a mediating variable linking employee competence to employee performance. Employees with higher competence are more likely to feel capable, confident, and prepared to perform their tasks. These positive perceptions may strengthen their motivation to work, persist, and achieve organisational expectations. In turn, motivated employees are more likely to apply their competencies effectively, resulting in better performance. Therefore, job motivation provides a theoretically meaningful explanation of why and how employee competence can lead to stronger employee performance.

Despite its theoretical relevance, the specific pathway linking employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance remains insufficiently examined in recent tourism and hospitality studies, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts such as Indonesia. Much of the recent literature has focused on employee well-being, sustainable employment, job characteristics, HR practices, and engagement (Kim & Baker, 2024; Li et al., 2025; Näppä et al., 2025; Saito et al., 2025), while relatively fewer studies have explicitly tested the mediating role of job motivation in the competence-performance relationship. This gap provides a strong rationale for the present study.

H_4: Job motivation mediates the relationship between employee competence and employee performance

2.5 Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Based on the preceding discussion, the literature provides strong theoretical and empirical support for the importance of employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance in human resource management. However, several gaps remain. First, although the direct influence of employee

competence on employee performance has been widely examined, fewer studies have explained the motivational mechanism through which competence is transformed into performance. Second, while recent tourism and hospitality studies have increasingly discussed employee well-being, sustainable employment, engagement, and HR practices, the specific EC → JM → EP pathway remains relatively underdeveloped. Third, this issue remains insufficiently explored in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, where organisational culture, labour conditions, managerial practices, and service-sector dynamics may shape the relationship among competence, motivation, and performance differently from other contexts.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by examining whether job motivation mediates the relationship between employee competence and employee performance in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. By doing so, this study contributes to the human resource management literature in two ways. Theoretically, it offers a more integrated explanation of the competence-performance relationship by incorporating job motivation as a mediating variable. Contextually, it extends empirical evidence from a Southeast Asian setting, thereby improving the regional relevance of tourism and hospitality HRM research. From a managerial perspective, this study also provides practical insight that improving employee performance requires not only the development of employee competence but also the strengthening of motivational conditions that encourage employees to apply their capabilities effectively, as shown in the Figure 1.

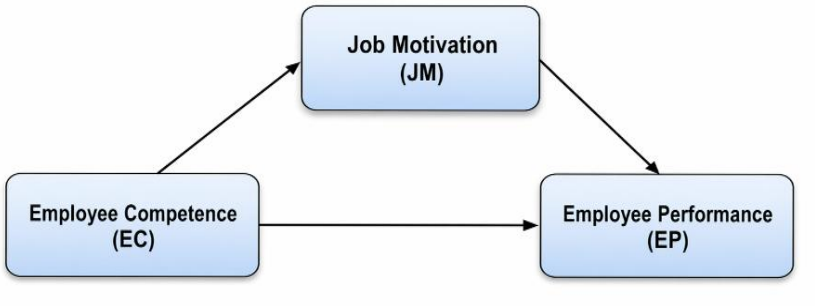

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study employed a survey-based quantitative research design to examine the relationships among employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to test the proposed hypotheses and analyse the direct and mediating effects among the research variables. In line with the conceptual framework developed in the previous section, the quantitative approach enabled the researcher to measure employees' perceptions systematically and evaluate the structural relationships between employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance using statistical procedures.

The population of this study consisted of active hotel employees in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This population was selected because hotel employees represent a relevant empirical context for examining competence, motivation, and performance, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector where service quality depends heavily on employee capability, work motivation, and behavioural performance. Since the study required respondents who had direct work experience in hotel operations and were able to provide relevant responses regarding the examined constructs, a purposive sampling technique was applied under the non-probability sampling approach.

Purposive sampling was chosen because not all individuals in the broader labour market were suitable for this study. Respondents had to meet specific criteria, namely being active hotel employees in Makassar and having sufficient experience to evaluate their own competence, motivation, and work performance. This sampling technique was therefore considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to target respondents who were directly related to the research objectives and capable of providing meaningful data. In this regard, purposive sampling helped ensure that the collected data were

contextually relevant to the hospitality industry and aligned with the study's focus on employee behaviour in hotel organisations.

A total sample of 152 respondents was considered adequate for this study based on related empirical studies and the analytical requirements of quantitative research using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to hotel employees. Interviews and direct observation were also used to support contextual understanding of the research setting, while secondary data were obtained from journals, reports, and other published documents relevant to human resource management, tourism, and hospitality studies (Bougie & Sekaran, 2025; Haeruddin et al., 2022; Musa et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2023; Natsir et al., 2021).

The data were analysed using validity and reliability tests, followed by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. PLS-SEM was used because it is suitable for examining complex relationships among latent variables, including direct and mediating effects. SmartPLS 4 (SmartPLS GmbH, Germany) and IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (IBM Corp., USA) were used to process and analyse the data. The analysis was conducted using an HP laptop with an Intel Core i7 processor, 8 GB of RAM, and the Windows 11 operating system.

Nevertheless, the use of purposive sampling also has methodological limitations and weaknesses. Since this technique is part of non-probability sampling, the findings of this study cannot be statistically generalized to all hotel employees in Makassar or other regions. In addition, purposive sampling may involve selection bias because respondents were selected based on predetermined criteria rather than random procedures. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted within the specific context of active hotel employees in Makassar. Future studies may consider probability sampling, larger samples, or comparative research across different regions to improve the generalisability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussions

Data collection was conducted from May to July 2025. During this period, 152 questionnaires were distributed to hotel employees who met the criteria established in this study. Of the total questionnaires distributed, 149 were returned and considered usable for further statistical analysis. This indicates a usable response rate of 98.03%, which is adequate for survey-based quantitative research.

Table 1. Questionnaire Distribution and Usable Response Rate

Item	Frequency
Questionnaires distributed	152
Questionnaires returned and usable	149
Usable response rate	98.03%

As shown in Table 1, the high response rate indicates that the respondents were sufficiently accessible and that the data collection process was effectively implemented during the survey period. This response rate also suggests that the collected data were appropriate for further analysis using validity, reliability, and structural model testing.

4.1 The Results of Validity and Reliability Test

Table 2. The Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	r-table	r-count
Employee Competence	0.733	0.743	0.159	0.649
Employee Performance	0.751	0.764	0.159	0.667
Job Motivation	1.000	1.000	0.159	1.000

Table 2 presents the results of the validity and reliability tests. The validity test shows that all variables meet the required validity criterion because each r-count value is higher than the r-table value of 0.159.

Based on this result, employee competence, employee performance, and job motivation can be considered valid constructs for further analysis. This indicates that the indicators used in the research instrument were able to represent the constructs measured in this study.

The reliability test also shows that all constructs meet the reliability requirement. The Cronbach's alpha value for employee competence is 0.733, employee performance is 0.751, and job motivation is 1.000. These values exceed the minimum reliability threshold of 0.60, indicating that the measurement instrument has acceptable internal consistency (Bougie & Sekaran, 2025). Therefore, the research instrument can be considered reliable and appropriate for the subsequent structural model analysis. However, the perfect reliability value for job motivation should be interpreted carefully because it may indicate a very narrow operationalisation of the construct or limited variation in the measurement items. This issue is further considered in the interpretation of the structural model results, particularly in relation to the non-significant mediation effect.

4.2 The Results of Direct and Indirect Effect Tests

Table 3. The Results of Direct and Specific Indirect Effects

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Decision
EC → JM	0.564	0.564	0.060	9.387	0.000	Supported
EC → EP	0.649	0.654	0.066	9.870	0.000	Supported
JM → EP	0.119	0.115	0.066	1.812	0.071	Not Supported
EC → JM → EP	0.067	0.065	0.039	1.702	0.089	Not Supported

Table 3 presents the results of the direct and indirect effect tests. The result shows that employee competence has a positive and significant effect on job motivation, with a coefficient value of 0.564 and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H_1 is supported. This finding indicates that employees with higher competence tend to demonstrate stronger job motivation.

The result also shows that employee competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a coefficient value of 0.649 and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, H_2 is supported. This result confirms that employee competence is an important direct predictor of employee performance in the hotel context examined in this study.

However, the effect of job motivation on employee performance is positive but not statistically significant at the 5% level. The coefficient value is 0.119, while the p-value is 0.071, which exceeds the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. Therefore, H_3 is not supported. This result indicates that job motivation, although positively associated with employee performance, does not have a sufficiently strong statistical effect on performance in this research context.

Similarly, the indirect effect of employee competence on employee performance through job motivation is also positive but not statistically significant. The coefficient value is 0.067, with a p-value of 0.089. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, H_4 is not supported. This means that job motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between employee competence and employee performance. In mediation terms, the results suggest a direct-only effect, where employee competence influences employee performance more strongly through a direct pathway rather than through job motivation as an intervening mechanism.

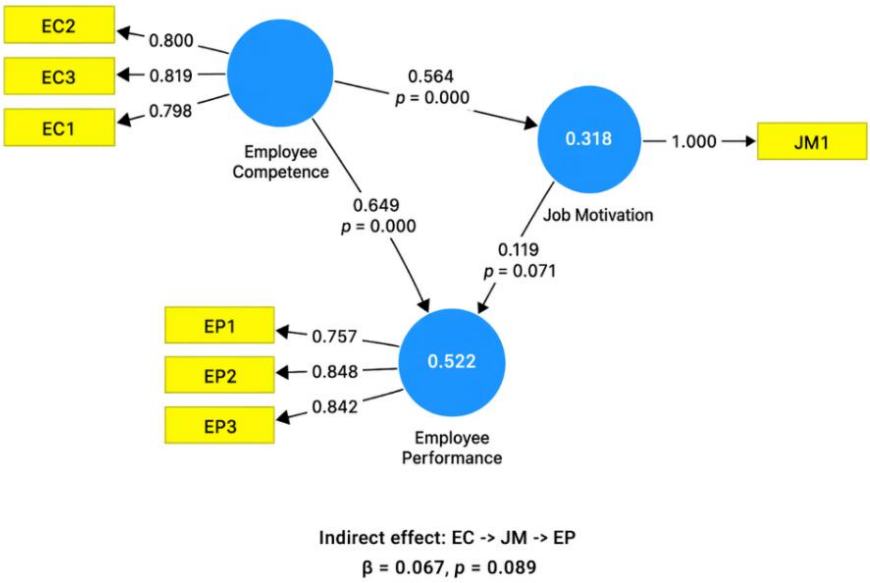

Figure 2. Summary of Structural Model Results

As illustrated in Figure 2, the strongest relationship in the structural model is the direct path from employee competence to employee performance. The path from employee competence to job motivation is also positive and statistically significant. However, the path from job motivation to employee performance is positive but statistically weak. This pattern explains why the indirect effect of employee competence on employee performance through job motivation is not significant.

4.3 Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship among employee competence, job motivation, and employee performance in the hotel industry in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. In line with the research gap identified in the introduction, this study confirms that employee competence plays a central role in improving employee performance. However, the findings also show that job motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between employee competence and employee performance. This result provides a more nuanced understanding of how employee competence contributes to performance in a Southeast Asian hospitality context.

First, the significant effect of employee competence on employee performance reinforces the central proposition of human capital theory, which views employee capability as a productive asset that contributes directly to organisational outcomes (Poteralska, Brozek, & Labedzka, 2024). In the hotel industry, competence includes technical expertise, customer-service capability, communication, problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork, and the ability to follow service standards. Employees who possess these capabilities are more likely to deliver efficient service, respond to guest needs, solve operational problems, and maintain service quality during customer interactions.

This finding is consistent with previous studies that identify competence as a major determinant of employee and organisational performance (Ismail et al., 2022; Musa, Haeruddin, Haeruddin, & Burhan, 2020; Rabiul, Mohd Shamsudin, Patwary, & Fee Yean, 2022; Rony et al., 2024; Slemp, Lee, & Mossman, 2021). It is also in line with hospitality-related literature emphasising that hotels need to continuously develop and retain a capable workforce in order to strengthen service quality and maintain competitiveness (Jawabreh, Masa'deh, Mahmoud, & Hamasha, 2020; Solnet, Baum, Robinson, & Lockstone-Binney, 2016; Youngblood, Nutta, Dickson, & Nutta, 2021). In practical terms, this result suggests that hotel organisations in Makassar can improve employee performance by strengthening competencies related to service delivery, communication, operational discipline, customer orientation, and adaptability.

Second, the significant effect of employee competence on job motivation indicates that competence contributes not only to what employees are able to do but also to how they perceive their ability to perform their work. Employees who feel competent are more likely to experience confidence, psychological readiness, and a sense of capability in completing their tasks. This finding is consistent with self-determination theory, which argues that the fulfilment of competence needs can strengthen intrinsic motivation, persistence, and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In other words, competence can create a motivational foundation because employees who possess relevant knowledge and skills are more likely to believe that they can perform successfully.

This result supports the argument that training and capability development may generate a dual benefit. On the one hand, they improve employees' technical and behavioural capabilities. On the other hand, they may strengthen employees' motivational state by increasing confidence, work readiness, and perceived effectiveness. This is relevant in hotel operations, where employees are expected to respond to service demands quickly and professionally. Employees who understand service procedures, customer expectations, and operational standards are more likely to feel prepared and motivated to perform their duties.

However, the result also shows that job motivation does not have a significant direct effect on employee performance. Although the coefficient is positive, the relationship does not reach the conventional 5% level of statistical significance. This finding does not necessarily mean that motivation is irrelevant. Rather, it suggests that in the specific context of this study, motivation alone is not strong enough to explain variations in employee performance after employee competence is taken into account. This interpretation is important because the hotel industry often operates through standardised procedures, service routines, supervisory control, and clearly defined operational expectations. Under such conditions, performance may depend more directly on whether employees possess the required competence than on their self-reported motivational state.

A deeper explanation of this non-significant result can be understood from the nature of hotel work. Hotel employees are often required to perform tasks according to established service standards, operational procedures, and managerial supervision. In such a structured work environment, employees may still be able to perform effectively when they possess sufficient competence, even if their level of motivation varies. For example, employees who have strong technical skills, communication ability, and service knowledge may be able to meet performance expectations because they understand what must be done and how to do it. Therefore, competence may function as a more immediate and observable driver of performance than motivation.

Another possible explanation is that motivation may influence performance only when it is supported by other organisational conditions. Motivation may become more powerful when employees receive recognition, career development opportunities, supportive leadership, fair rewards, and a positive work climate. Without these enabling conditions, motivation may not be strong enough to produce measurable performance improvements. This view is consistent with studies suggesting that competence and motivation are more likely to generate stronger outcomes when supported by favourable organisational environments, leadership practices, and psychological conditions (Liu, Yang, & Singhdong, 2024; Medina-Garrido, Biedma-Ferrer, & Bogren, 2023; Riyanto, Endri, & Herlissha, 2021).

The non-significant mediation effect of job motivation also requires careful interpretation. Theoretically, job motivation was expected to mediate the relationship between employee competence and employee performance because competence reflects what employees can do, while motivation reflects whether employees are willing to use their capabilities consistently. However, the empirical results show that this mechanism was not supported. Although employee competence significantly increases job motivation, job motivation does not significantly increase employee performance. As a result, the indirect pathway from employee competence to employee performance through job motivation is not statistically significant.

This finding suggests that in the hotel context examined in this study, competence is translated into performance primarily through a direct mechanism rather than through motivation. In other words, competent employees may perform better not necessarily because competence first increases their motivation, but because competence directly enables them to complete tasks, solve service problems, communicate effectively, and meet operational standards. This result refines the assumption that motivation always serves as the main psychological bridge between capability and performance. Instead, the present study shows that the mediating role of motivation may depend on the organisational and cultural context in which employees work.

This interpretation is particularly relevant for the Southeast Asian and Indonesian hospitality context. Hotel employees in Makassar may work within organisational systems where performance is strongly shaped by procedural compliance, supervisor expectations, role clarity, and service standards. In such contexts, employee competence may be more visible and more directly rewarded in performance assessments than motivational attitudes. Therefore, although motivation remains important, it may not be the dominant mechanism that explains how competence improves performance. This finding contributes to the literature by showing that the competence-motivation-performance relationship is not always linear and that motivational mediation may vary across organisational and regional contexts.

The non-significant mediation result may also be related to methodological and measurement considerations. The reliability value of job motivation in this study is very high, which may indicate that the construct was measured in a relatively narrow or homogeneous manner. If job motivation is captured too narrowly, it may not fully represent the broader motivational dimensions that influence performance, such as intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, identified regulation, recognition, career aspiration, and work meaning. Consequently, the statistical effect of motivation on performance may appear weaker. Future studies should consider using a more multidimensional measurement of job motivation to capture different forms of motivation more comprehensively.

Furthermore, because this study used a cross-sectional survey design, the motivational process may not be fully captured. Motivation may influence performance over time rather than immediately. Employees may become more motivated after receiving training or developing competence, but the effect of that motivation on performance may emerge gradually through repeated work behaviour, stronger engagement, or long-term commitment. Therefore, future research may use longitudinal designs to examine whether job motivation mediates the competence–performance relationship over a longer period.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that hotel organisations should prioritise competency development as a central strategy for improving employee performance. Competencies related to technical ability, customer orientation, communication, decision-making, teamwork, adaptability, and service recovery should be systematically identified, developed, and evaluated (Papageorgiou, Marneros, & Efstathiades, 2024; Peethambaran & Naim, 2024). Training, performance evaluation, coaching, and developmental supervision remain important because they help employees maintain service standards and respond effectively to changing operational conditions (Domi & Domi, 2021).

At the same time, the non-significant mediation effect should not be interpreted as a reason to ignore motivation. Instead, hotel organisations should understand that motivation may need to be supported by stronger organisational systems before it can influence performance significantly. Recognition, fair rewards, career development, supportive leadership, feedback, and work-life balance should continue to be strengthened because these practices can improve the broader work environment and may enhance the long-term effect of motivation on employee performance.

Based on the overall discussion of this study, it can be emphasized that this study provides two important contributions. First, it confirms that employee competence is a decisive determinant of employee performance in the hotel industry. Second, it shows that although employee competence significantly strengthens job motivation, job motivation does not significantly transmit the effect of

competence to performance in the present context. Therefore, this study contributes to the human resource management literature by demonstrating that the relationship among competence, motivation, and performance is more complex than a simple mediation model suggests. In the Makassar hotel context, competence emerges as the most direct and dependable predictor of employee performance, while job motivation appears to function more as a related psychological outcome of competence than as a significant intervening mechanism between competence and performance.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study shows that employee competence has a positive and significant effect on job motivation and employee performance in the hotel industry in Makassar. However, job motivation does not significantly affect employee performance and does not mediate the relationship between competence and performance. Therefore, employee performance is more directly influenced by competence than by motivation. These findings highlight the importance of competency-based human resource management in improving service quality, work effectiveness, and employee performance in the hospitality sector.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study is limited to hotel employees in Makassar, so the findings may not be generalizable to other sectors or regions. The use of purposive sampling, cross-sectional data, and self-reported questionnaires may also limit the representativeness and accuracy of the results. In addition, this study only examines competence, motivation, and performance, while other relevant factors such as leadership, organizational culture, job satisfaction, and work environment are not included.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should involve broader samples from different hotel categories, service industries, regions, or countries to improve generalizability. Researchers are also encouraged to use probability sampling, longitudinal designs, and mixed methods to obtain deeper and more reliable findings. Future studies should also include additional variables such as leadership style, organizational support, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture to better explain employee performance.

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Author Contribution

MIMH contributed to the conceptualization of the study, the development of the research methodology, overall supervision of the research process, and the preparation of the original draft of the manuscript. AC was responsible for conducting the formal analysis, organizing and managing the research data, and contributing to the writing of the original draft. MYM contributed to the investigation process, the provision and management of research resources, and the administration of the research project. RR was involved in the data collection process, particularly in distributing questionnaires to respondents and supporting the organization and curation of the collected data. KS contributed to the validation of the research findings, the preparation of visual materials, and the review and editing of the manuscript to improve its academic quality and clarity. All authors made meaningful contributions to the development of the article, reviewed the final version, and approved the submitted manuscript.

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