

Evaluation of Service Quality in Shandong Confucian Cultural Tourism Hotels Based on Tourist Perception

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Abstract: This study evaluates service quality in Confucian cultural tourism hotels in Shandong Province from the perspective of tourists. It responds to a practical problem in cultural accommodation: hotels often reproduce Confucian symbols in architecture and decoration, but tourists judge quality through a wider bundle of tangible facilities, ritualised host-guest interaction, authenticity and psychological value. A mixed-method design was used. In the first stage, 11,245 valid online reviews posted between January 2023 and March 2026 on major Chinese online travel platforms were processed through word-frequency analysis, semantic-network interpretation, sentiment analysis and latent Dirichlet allocation topic modelling. In the second stage, 618 valid questionnaires collected from visitors in Qufu and Tai'an were analysed by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The results show that perceived service quality and cultural authenticity both significantly improve tourist satisfaction. Cultural authenticity has a strong positive effect on service personal values, and service personal values further enhance satisfaction. However, service personal values do not directly drive positive word of mouth; their effect is transmitted through satisfaction. The findings extend service-quality evaluation from functional hotel attributes to culturally situated value perception and provide operational implications for Confucian cultural tourism hotels in Shandong.

Keywords: Confucian culture; cultural tourism hotel; service quality; tourist perception; cultural authenticity; structural equation modelling

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism has moved from sightseeing-centred consumption towards immersive experience in which heritage, emotion and service interaction are evaluated together. Shandong Province is one of the most important regions for Confucian heritage in China, especially in Qufu, Tai'an and Jinan. Hotels that claim a Confucian cultural theme therefore operate not only as accommodation facilities but also as spaces where visitors expect ritual courtesy, cultural atmosphere and ethical host-guest relations. The managerial challenge is that symbolic decoration alone cannot guarantee perceived quality. Tourists may praise a hotel for its architectural style while criticising weak room maintenance, impersonal service or staged cultural activities.

Classic service-quality research explains perceived quality through reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles, but cultural hotels add another evaluative layer: authenticity. In a Confucian context, tourists may also seek self-cultivation, social recognition and a sense of refined cultural identity. Based on these concerns, this study asks three questions: What service attributes do tourists emphasise in spontaneous online reviews? How do cultural authenticity and service personal values shape satisfaction? Does the Confucian value mechanism directly lead to positive word of mouth, or is satisfaction required as a mediator?

The specific context of Shandong makes this problem theoretically and practically important. Confucian heritage is not an abstract brand label in this region; it is embedded in destination narratives, school-trip memories, family rites, local cuisine and public expectations about proper conduct. A visitor who chooses a Confucian cultural hotel normally expects more than a clean room near a scenic site. The visitor may expect a coherent cultural script in which architectural symbols, employee language, meal service, educational activities and quiet spaces for reflection support one another. If these elements are fragmented, the hotel may be perceived as commercialised even when the physical investment is

substantial. Therefore, the evaluation of service quality in this setting requires an integrated model that can connect operational reliability with cultural meaning.

This study contributes in three ways. First, it uses online review mining to identify the vocabulary through which tourists naturally describe Confucian hotel experiences, reducing the risk that the research model is imposed only by the researcher. Second, it combines the review evidence with a survey-based structural model, allowing the study to test whether cultural authenticity and personal values have measurable effects beyond conventional service-quality dimensions. Third, it clarifies the behavioural mechanism behind positive word of mouth in a Confucian consumption context. This is useful because hotel managers often assume that distinctive cultural products automatically generate recommendation behaviour, whereas the evidence suggests that tourists still require an overall satisfaction judgement before they are willing to endorse the hotel to others.

1.1 Literature Review and Hypotheses

Service quality remains a central determinant of satisfaction in hospitality. Communication and control processes in service delivery highlight that service quality is not only a technical result but also a relational process (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988). In cultural tourism, authenticity becomes a key extension of this logic. Kolar and Zabkar (2010) argue that tourists evaluate both object-based and existential authenticity, which helps explain why cultural motivation can be converted into loyalty. For Shandong Confucian hotels, object-based authenticity includes architecture, calligraphy, classical furnishings and cuisine, whereas existential authenticity emerges when tourists feel that rituals, courtesy and learning activities support self-cultivation.

Personal values are especially relevant in Confucian service consumption. Nguyen, Vo and Hoang (2021) found that personal values in Confucian luxury hotel consumption enhance satisfaction, while satisfaction rather than personal values directly triggers word of mouth. This suggests that tourists may privately value cultural recognition, but they recommend a hotel only when the total experience is satisfying. Tourist value research further shows that perceived value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions are connected in experiential tourism contexts (Williams & Soutar, 2009). Recent hotel studies also confirm that service evaluation significantly influences behavioural intention through psychological mechanisms such as trust and engagement (Chen, et al, 2022). Tourist satisfaction itself can be understood through expectation confirmation and evaluative judgement (Oliver, 1980). Online reviews and topic models are useful because they reveal tourists' natural language rather than only researcher-defined survey items (Blei, Ng, & Jordan, 2003). Online review studies in tourism also demonstrate that tourist perception and behavioural segmentation can be effectively identified through review analytics (Assaker, et al, 2020). Accordingly, this study proposes five hypotheses: H1a, extended basic service quality positively affects tourist satisfaction; H1b, cultural authenticity positively affects tourist satisfaction; H2, cultural authenticity positively affects service personal values; H3, service personal values positively affects tourist satisfaction; H4, tourist satisfaction positively affects positive word of mouth; and H5, service personal values affect word of mouth indirectly through satisfaction.

The literature on cultural heritage tourism also suggests that authenticity is multidimensional. Object-based authenticity refers to the perceived genuineness of visible objects, places and historical references, while existential authenticity refers to the visitor's felt state of being personally connected with the experience. In a Confucian hotel, object-based authenticity may be communicated through courtyard design, calligraphy, classical furniture, ritual vessels, Confucian cuisine and the careful use of local historical narratives. Existential authenticity, however, depends more on whether the visitor feels respected, intellectually enriched and emotionally settled. This distinction is essential because tourists may recognise a visually attractive cultural setting but still reject the experience as superficial if employee behaviour, programme design or commercial messaging does not support the cultural promise.

Service personal values provide the psychological bridge between authenticity and satisfaction. In the original luxury-service value literature, experiential life, self-enhancement, social recognition and social integration capture benefits that go beyond utilitarian consumption. These dimensions fit Confucian cultural tourism because visitors may use hotel experiences to learn, cultivate taste, strengthen family interaction or display cultural competence in socially acceptable ways. In this sense, the hotel is not simply selling accommodation. It is selling a temporary identity position: the guest becomes a culturally refined traveller who participates in heritage rather than merely observes it. The stronger this perceived value, the more likely the visitor is to form a favourable satisfaction judgement, provided that the service fundamentals are not violated.

The hypotheses therefore treat satisfaction as both an outcome and a filter. Extended service quality and cultural authenticity are expected to improve satisfaction directly because they influence the guest's immediate appraisal of the stay. Cultural authenticity is also expected to enhance service personal values because credible cultural experiences make self-cultivation and social recognition more believable. Yet positive word of mouth is treated more conservatively. In Confucian-influenced consumption, recommendation involves social risk: a poor recommendation can damage the recommender's judgement and relational credibility. For this reason, the model expects satisfaction to mediate the value-to-WOM relationship rather than assuming that personal value fulfilment alone is sufficient for public advocacy.

2. Methodology

A mixed-method research design was adopted. The qualitative stage used online reviews from Ctrip, Meituan and Qunar for 12 representative Confucian or heritage-oriented hotels in Qufu, Tai' an and Jinan. The use of online hotel reviews as a data source for analysing service quality is consistent with recent hospitality studies that employ customer review analytics (Kalnaovakul & Promsivapallop, 2023). After removing default praise, advertisements, corrupted records and comments shorter than 20 Chinese characters, 11,245 valid reviews remained from an original pool of 15,682. Jieba segmentation, a Chinese stop-word list and a hotel-domain stop-word list were used before word-frequency and co-occurrence analysis. Sentiment polarity was classified into positive, neutral and negative categories. LDA topic modelling was conducted with model selection guided by coherence and perplexity.

Hotel selection followed three principles. First, selected properties had to be located in Shandong cities with strong Confucian or heritage tourism resources, especially Qufu, Tai' an and Jinan. Second, the hotel's public description, interior design or product portfolio had to contain a clear cultural or heritage orientation rather than only a generic business-hotel positioning. Third, the hotel had to have a sufficient number of online reviews to support text mining. The final sample included traditional courtyard-style properties, hotels connected with heritage scenic areas and modern hotels that use Confucian cultural symbols in rooms, restaurants or public spaces. This sampling logic was intended to capture variation in cultural expression while keeping the destination context coherent.

The text-mining procedure included several safeguards. Duplicate reviews were removed where the user name, date and content were identical. Default positive comments generated automatically by platforms were excluded because they do not represent active tourist perception. After segmentation, synonyms were merged to reduce artificial dispersion; for example, terms referring to courtesy, ritual politeness and respectful reception were coded into a broader ritual-service category when used in similar contexts. The LDA model was interpreted not only by high-probability keywords but also by reading representative comments within each topic, because topic labels should reflect actual tourist meaning rather than mechanical word clusters.

The quantitative stage used a structured questionnaire administered from October to December 2025 in Qufu Nishan Sacred Land, selected hotel lobbies and targeted online hotel-booking communities. Respondents had to be at least 18 years old and have stayed at a target hotel for at least one night. Of 752 returned questionnaires, 618 were valid after excluding incomplete responses, straight-lining and responses completed in less than 90 seconds. SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 26.0 were used for descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Reliability and validity were evaluated with factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the heterotrait-monotrait logic for discriminant validity and model-fit indices (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Mediation was tested through 5,000 bootstrap samples following contemporary mediation recommendations (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

All scale items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Basic service quality covered tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Cultural authenticity measured the perceived genuineness of cultural space, cultural activity, service ritual and local heritage connection. Service personal values were represented by experiential life, self-enhancement, social recognition and social integration. Satisfaction captured the overall affective and cognitive evaluation of the stay, while positive word of mouth measured willingness to recommend, share favourable comments and encourage others to experience the hotel. The questionnaire was first reviewed by three tourism-management researchers and then pre-tested with 50 respondents. Ambiguous items were revised to ensure that respondents could distinguish functional service attributes from cultural authenticity and personal-value items.

Common method bias was addressed procedurally and statistically. Procedurally, the survey assured anonymity, separated predictor and outcome blocks and used neutral wording to reduce social desirability pressure. Statistically, the satisfactory fit of the measurement model and the discriminant-validity evidence indicate that the constructs were not collapsed into a single general evaluation factor. Although these steps cannot eliminate all common-method concerns, they make the observed structural paths more credible for an exploratory cultural-hospitality model.

3. Results

The online review results show that culture, service, experience and environment form the first tier of tourist attention. The frequent appearance of ritual and courtesy indicates that tourists connect Confucian culture with the details of host-guest interaction rather than with decoration alone. Figure 1 reports the ten most frequent terms after synonym consolidation.

The high-frequency results are important because they show that tourists use both functional and symbolic language. Words such as room, breakfast and facilities indicate that conventional hotel attributes remain highly salient. At the same time, culture, ritual, courtesy and Qufu show that tourists interpret the hotel through a destination-specific cultural frame. This combination suggests that cultural theme hotels cannot separate the back-of-house quality system from the front-stage cultural story. A weak breakfast, a noisy room or a slow response can damage the perceived credibility of the cultural theme because tourists experience all service encounters as part of the same stay.

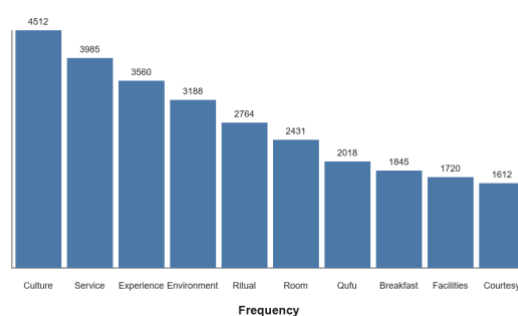


Figure 1. High-frequency terms in online reviews of Shandong Confucian cultural tourism hotels

Sentiment analysis shows a strongly positive evaluation pattern, with 84.2% positive, 9.3% neutral and 6.5% negative comments. Negative comments mainly concerned functional service failures, such as sound insulation and cleanliness, and breaks in cultural experience, such as polite-looking spaces accompanied by cold employee attitudes.

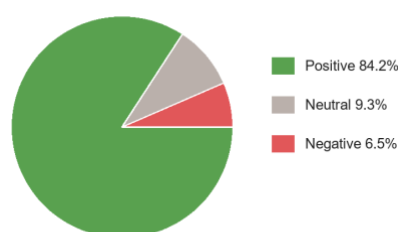


Figure 2. Sentiment distribution of valid online reviews

LDA modelling extracted four themes: Confucian ambience and physical environment, ritual service and host-guest interaction, functional reliability and facilities, and cultural resonance and self-cultivation. These themes bridge conventional service-quality dimensions and culturally specific value perception.

The first topic, Confucian ambience and physical environment, contained comments about courtyards, classical decoration, calligraphy, quietness and the feeling of being close to heritage sites. This topic corresponds partly to the tangible dimension of service quality, but it also indicates a symbolic reading of space. The second topic, ritual service and host-guest interaction, included terms linked to greeting, explanation, patience, respect and family-like care. This topic is especially distinctive because it translates Confucian ethics into service behaviour. The third topic, functional reliability and facilities, reflected basic hotel performance, including bed quality, hot water, hygiene, internet connection, parking and food. The fourth topic, cultural resonance and self-cultivation, was smaller in weight but theoretically significant because it contained references to learning, calmness, children's education, calligraphy practice and reflective travel. Together, these themes justify the use of an extended SERVQUAL model rather than a purely functional hotel-quality scale.

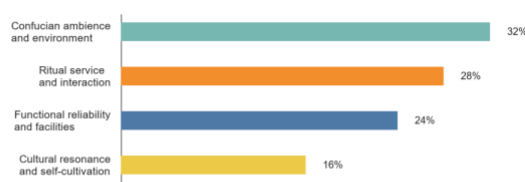


Figure 3. Topic weights generated from LDA modelling

Table 1. Top high-frequency terms and cognitive dimensions

Rank	Term	Frequency	Part of speech	Cognitive dimension
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1	Culture	4,512	Noun	Core cultural perception
2	Service	3,985	Noun	Service-quality evaluation
3	Experience	3,560	Noun	Experiential value
4	Environment	3,188	Noun	Physical atmosphere
5	Ritual	2,764	Noun	Confucian host-guest interaction
6	Room	2,431	Noun	Accommodation function
7	Qufu	2,018	Noun	Place association
8	Breakfast	1,845	Noun	Food and beverage quality
9	Facilities	1,720	Noun	Tangibles and reliability
10	Courtesy	1,612	Noun	Empathy and assurance

The SEM measurement model showed acceptable fit: chi-square/df = 2.053, RMSEA = 0.041, CFI = 0.962, TLI = 0.955 and IFI = 0.963. All standardised factor loadings were between 0.72 and 0.91 and were statistically significant. Composite reliability ranged from 0.852 to 0.925, and all AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity.

The demographic profile also supports the interpretation of the model. Among the 618 valid respondents, women accounted for 51.5% and men for 48.5%, suggesting a relatively balanced sample. The largest age group was 26-35 years old, followed by 36-45 and 18-25, which indicates that young and middle-aged tourists are active consumers of cultural accommodation in Shandong. Respondents with a bachelor's degree or above accounted for 86.4%, consistent with the assumption that Confucian cultural tourism hotels attract visitors with relatively high cultural capital. Leisure and cultural experience were the dominant travel motive, while business travel formed a smaller but still meaningful segment. These characteristics do not make the sample fully representative of all hotel guests, but they fit the target population for cultural tourism hotel consumption.

Discriminant validity was further supported because the square root of AVE for each latent construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, and no construct pair showed conceptual redundancy. This result matters because basic service quality, cultural authenticity and satisfaction can easily become blurred in hospitality surveys. The evidence suggests that respondents could distinguish whether a hotel performed well operationally, whether its cultural expression felt authentic and whether they were satisfied overall. This distinction strengthens the argument that cultural authenticity adds explanatory value rather than simply repeating a general satisfaction judgement.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity of latent constructs

Latent construct	Items	Factor loading range	CR	AVE
Basic service quality (BSQ)	5	0.74-0.86	0.885	0.612
Cultural authenticity (CA)	4	0.79-0.91	0.910	0.718
Service personal values (SPV)	13	0.72-0.88	0.925	0.587
Tourist satisfaction (SAT)	3	0.82-0.90	0.902	0.754
Positive word of mouth (WOM)	3	0.80-0.89	0.891	0.732

The structural model supports H1a, H1b, H2, H3 and H4. Basic service quality positively affects satisfaction (beta = 0.38, $t = 6.12$, $p < 0.001$), and cultural authenticity also has a positive direct effect on satisfaction (beta = 0.31, $t = 4.88$, $p < 0.001$). Cultural authenticity strongly activates service personal values (beta = 0.62, $t = 9.85$, $p < 0.001$). Service personal values significantly improve satisfaction (beta = 0.26, $t = 4.35$, $p < 0.001$), while satisfaction strongly predicts positive word of mouth (beta = 0.71, $t = 12.45$, $p < 0.001$). The direct path from service personal values to positive word of mouth is not significant (beta = 0.05, $t = 0.98$, $p > 0.05$). The bootstrapped indirect effect of service personal values on word of mouth through satisfaction is 0.185, and the 95% confidence interval excludes zero. H5 is therefore supported.

The coefficient pattern provides several substantive insights. The strongest path is from cultural authenticity to service personal values, which means that authenticity is not only an aesthetic judgement but also a generator of psychological benefits. Tourists who perceive the cultural setting as credible are more likely to feel that the stay enriches their life, improves their cultural taste or supports social recognition. The path from satisfaction to positive word of mouth is also very strong, confirming that recommendation behaviour depends on a broad appraisal of the whole stay. By contrast, the non-significant direct effect of service personal values on WOM shows that guests may value the cultural experience privately without immediately recommending it publicly. This is consistent with a culturally cautious pattern of advocacy.

The mediation result is particularly relevant for practice. A hotel can invest heavily in Confucian lectures, ceremonial meals or courtyard design, and these activities may successfully create personal value. However, if satisfaction is weakened by poor sleep quality, slow response or crowded activities, the personal-value effect will not translate into positive word of mouth. Satisfaction therefore operates as a conversion mechanism. It transforms inner value recognition into outward recommendation. This finding also explains why some culturally distinctive hotels receive attention but fail to generate stable online advocacy: their cultural products are memorable, but the total service system does not consistently support recommendation.

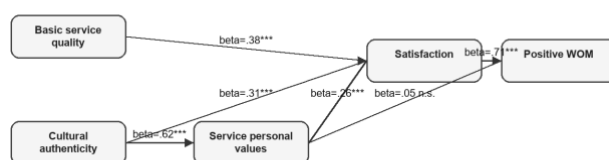


Figure 4. Structural model and standardised path coefficients

4. Discussion

The findings show that tourists evaluate Confucian cultural tourism hotels through an integrated lens. This supports hospitality research suggesting that satisfaction emerges from integrated and co-created service experiences rather than isolated functional attributes (Kuzgun, et al, 2022). The word-frequency and topic results indicate that physical environment, cultural atmosphere and service detail are not separate experiences in tourists' minds. Instead, tourists read small service behaviours as evidence of whether the Confucian theme is authentic. This supports the view that authenticity in heritage consumption is constructed through both objects and lived experience (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

The results also refine the meaning of cultural authenticity in a hotel context. In museums or heritage sites, authenticity is often tied to conservation, historical continuity and interpretive accuracy. In hotels, authenticity is more performative and relational. Tourists judge whether the cultural promise is enacted in check-in language, employee explanations, restaurant rituals, children's activities, guest-room details and the emotional tone of service recovery. A broken service encounter can therefore be interpreted as a cultural failure, not merely an operational failure. This is why the semantic network linked culture, service and details so closely. Tourists expect Confucian hospitality to appear in small acts of attention.

The study further indicates that cultural hotel service quality should be managed as a layered system. Similar findings in tourism-service research show that destination image and service quality are jointly constructed through integrated visitor experiences (Sharafuddin, et al, 2022). The bottom layer is functional reliability: cleanliness, safety, maintenance, quietness, food quality and response speed. The middle layer is cultural staging: architecture, interior design, narratives, rituals, learning activities and local heritage linkages. The top layer is value realisation: self-cultivation, family education, social recognition, calmness and identity confirmation. Failure at the bottom layer restricts the effect of the upper layers. Conversely, strong cultural staging can amplify satisfaction only when functional reliability is stable. This layered interpretation helps managers avoid both extremes: a generic hotel with superficial cultural decoration and a culturally rich hotel with weak operational discipline.

The SEM results also clarify the role of personal values. Cultural authenticity produces a strong effect on service personal values, which means that genuine Confucian settings can activate self-cultivation, social recognition and identity-related benefits. However, these values do not directly produce positive word of mouth. Consistent with Nguyen et al. (2021), satisfaction is the necessary evaluative bridge. In managerial terms, cultural symbolism cannot compensate for weak operational reliability. A hotel may create cultural interest, but tourists will recommend it only when the accommodation fundamentals, employee interaction and cultural programme work together.

For theory, the findings support an extension of SERVQUAL in which cultural authenticity is not treated as a decorative add-on but as a core antecedent of satisfaction and personal value. They also support a culturally contingent view of word of mouth. In many hospitality models, value and satisfaction both directly predict behavioural intention. In

this study, personal value requires satisfaction as a mediator. This does not mean that values are unimportant; rather, it means that values need confirmation through the total experience before they become socially communicable. This point is especially useful for Confucian-culture contexts, where public recommendation can be tied to face, relational trust and concern for the recipient's experience.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study contributes to cultural hotel service-quality research by combining online review mining with survey-based SEM evidence. It demonstrates that extended service quality, cultural authenticity and service personal values jointly explain tourist satisfaction in Shandong Confucian cultural tourism hotels. The strongest cultural path is from authenticity to service personal values, but the strongest behavioural path is from satisfaction to positive word of mouth.

Managers should therefore avoid a purely symbolic approach to Confucian theming. First, staff training should translate Confucian ideas such as benevolence, ritual propriety and respectful hospitality into service standards at check-in, dining, housekeeping and cultural activities. Second, hotels should design products that combine cultural learning with social and emotional value, such as family rites-of-passage experiences, calligraphy learning, Confucian dining etiquette and curated visits to nearby heritage sites. Third, cultural innovation must be built on reliable hotel operations: cleanliness, sleep quality, food safety, sound insulation and maintenance remain the baseline for recommendation. Finally, hotels should connect internal cultural programmes with regional smart-tourism platforms so that accommodation, heritage visitation, dining and learning form a coherent Shandong Confucian travel experience.

Several concrete actions follow from these implications. Hotels should build a service blueprint that identifies every guest touchpoint and specifies both the functional standard and the cultural expression expected at that point. For example, check-in should not only be fast; it should include concise, non-intrusive cultural orientation. Restaurant service should not only deliver food; it should explain local dishes and etiquette where appropriate. Cultural activities should be scheduled and staffed professionally so that they feel educational rather than improvised. Service recovery should also be culturally aligned: an apology in a Confucian hotel should communicate sincerity, respect and responsibility, not only compensation.

Human-resource management is central to this transformation. Employees should not be asked merely to memorise slogans about Confucian culture. Training should connect cultural concepts with observable behaviours, such as greeting forms, tone of explanation, patience with elderly guests, care for family groups and respectful handling of complaints. Assessment systems should include cultural-service indicators alongside conventional operational indicators. Hotels can also cooperate with local scholars, heritage interpreters and cultural institutions to keep the content accurate and avoid reducing Confucian culture to visual symbols.

Digital management should support rather than replace cultural hospitality. Review mining can be used continuously to detect whether tourists are discussing culture in connection with service detail, or whether negative comments show a gap between decoration and lived experience. Hotels can classify online comments according to the four topics identified in this study and track changes over time. If functional-reliability complaints rise, managers should correct operations before launching new cultural campaigns. If cultural-resonance comments decline, the hotel should review whether activities have become routine, crowded or too commercial. In this way, tourist perception becomes an operational feedback system.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The study has limitations. The survey used convenience sampling and focused mainly on domestic tourists in Shandong, which may restrict cross-cultural generalisation. Online text mining may also under-detect irony, metaphor and mixed emotions in comments. Future research could compare Confucian-culture tourists from different East Asian societies with Western tourists, include physiological or eye-tracking measures for cultural-symbol perception, and test whether the model remains stable across hotel price levels and destination types.

Several future directions are worth pursuing. First, longitudinal data could examine whether cultural authenticity has a lasting effect on loyalty or whether the effect weakens after novelty declines. Second, multi-group SEM could compare family tourists, solo travellers, educational groups and business guests because each segment may attach different meaning to Confucian culture. Third, cross-regional comparison with other Chinese cultural hotel clusters, such as Tang culture in Xi'an or Jiangnan literati culture in Suzhou and Hangzhou, would help determine which findings are Confucian-specific and which apply more broadly to cultural theme hotels. Fourth, future research could combine review mining with actual operational indicators such as occupancy, repeat booking and complaint resolution time. Such integration would make the service-quality model more useful for hotel performance management.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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