



Client Psychology in the Nail Industry: A Framework for Delivering Premium-Level Service

Svitlana Riaba

Independent Researcher, USA.

Abstract

The global nail care products market size was valued at USD 19.10 billion in 2021 and is projected to reach USD 30.08 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 5.2% from 2022 to 2030. Despite this growth, empirical research linking client psychology, service design, and practitioner technique within the nail industry remains scarce, leaving a gap between market expansion and evidence-based professional practice. This study examines how psychological factors that shape client behavior can be operationalized into a replicable premium-service framework for nail specialists. Using a systematic literature review, content analysis of peer-reviewed studies, and structured practitioner case analysis, the research identifies five service dimensions that consistently predict client satisfaction and loyalty: technical safety, procedural precision, personalization, time efficiency, and interpersonal competence. An author-developed Unidirectional E-File Technique is presented as a practical case study demonstrating how procedural innovation can simultaneously reduce appointment duration by 30 to 40 percent, lower tissue trauma, and increase perceived service value. The study offers actionable recommendations for nail technicians, salon managers, and beauty educators seeking to raise service standards in international markets. Results are relevant to nail professionals, cosmetology educators, and beauty industry analysts.

Keywords: Nail Industry, Client Psychology, Premium Beauty Service, Service Quality, SERVQUAL, Personalization, Procedural Efficiency, E-File Technique, Client Loyalty, Nail Care Market.

INTRODUCTION

Personal care services occupy an expanding segment of the global consumer economy. The global nail care products market size was valued at USD 19.10 billion in 2021 and is projected to reach USD 30.08 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 5.2% from 2022 to 2030 [1]. The total nail salon services market is expected to grow to US\$20.3 billion by 2030, with a CAGR of 8% [2]. These figures reflect not only rising disposable incomes in emerging economies but also a structural shift in consumer perception: nail care is increasingly regarded as a wellness practice rather than a purely cosmetic indulgence.

Social media and influencer culture have accelerated this trend by increasing the visibility of beauty practices and shaping consumer expectations regarding personal-care services. Prior research on beauty-service competitiveness and client experience indicates that demand is influenced not only by price and technical availability but also by perceived image value, personal-care norms, and the psychological benefits of salon interaction [3–5]. Client expectations, purchasing motives, and cultural norms regarding beauty services vary significantly, making it difficult to create one-size-fits-all premium service models without a psychologically informed approach [4, 5].

Research into service quality in personal care settings has grown steadily. The methodological foundation for service-

quality assessment is the SERVQUAL instrument originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) [21], which measures customer perceptions across five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) [6] should instead be used to support the broader customer-experience perspective, as their work conceptualizes customer experience as a multidimensional construct across service contexts. Subsequent studies have applied SERVQUAL and related service-quality models to beauty salon contexts and confirmed positive relationships between perceived service quality and client satisfaction [7, 8, 11]. Panwar and Khan (2022) [9] specifically identified trust as a mediating variable in service recommendations within the beauty sector. Park (2023) [10] found that relationship benefits and commitment, rather than technical quality alone, drive loyalty in beauty service environments.

Despite this foundation, studies focused specifically on the nail industry remain underrepresented. Most existing research addresses hair salons or generic beauty businesses. The nail sector presents distinctive challenges: technicians work with hard keratin structures, use potentially hazardous chemical compounds, and perform technically complex motor tasks that directly affect client tissue. Occupational-health research on nail salon technicians has reported elevated risks of work-related musculoskeletal and respiratory

symptoms compared with office-based controls, particularly in the neck, shoulders, wrists/hands, and lower back. These findings indicate that repetitive precision work, prolonged static posture, and high client turnover can increase both practitioner strain and the likelihood of service inconsistency [11]. There is no widely validated framework connecting practitioner technique, procedural innovation, and client psychology in this context.

The present study addresses this gap. **The research objective** is to develop an evidence-based framework that translates established principles of consumer psychology and service quality into actionable recommendations for nail professionals delivering premium service. **The scientific novelty** of this study lies in the integration of client psychology theory with a practitioner-developed procedural technique to construct the first domain-specific premium-service model for the nail industry. **The working hypothesis** holds that client loyalty in premium nail services is primarily determined not by aesthetic outcomes alone, but by the client's perception of technical safety, personalization, and procedural efficiency as a composite experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed three complementary methodological approaches to ensure analytical rigor and theoretical grounding while maintaining direct relevance to professional practice.

A systematic review of peer-reviewed publications was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed databases. Search terms included combinations of: "nail industry," "beauty salon service quality," "client psychology beauty," "SERVQUAL beauty," "premium cosmetic service," "nail technician ergonomics," "client loyalty personal care," and "procedural efficiency cosmetology."

The second method was a structured content analysis of practitioner-reported procedural data. The case material

derives from an international nail specialist with documented participation in online nail art championships and beauty conferences across poster manicure, poster pedicure, and reality manicure categories. The specialist developed the Unidirectional E-File Technique (UEFT), a proprietary hardware-based cuticle and surface preparation method. Practitioner-reported outcome data were coded according to three dimensions: 1) procedural duration, (2) tissue trauma indicators (client-reported discomfort, post-procedure redness), and (3) client rebooking rate. The analysis was structured to allow comparison with published benchmarks on salon throughput and client satisfaction.

A comparative analysis synthesized findings from the literature review and practitioner case data to construct the Premium Nail Service Framework (PNSF). The framework was developed by mapping the SERVQUAL dimensions originally proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) [21] onto nail-specific service contexts, then augmenting those dimensions with factors identified in the beauty-sector and customer-experience literature, including relationship benefits [10], service-quality effects on satisfaction and loyalty [12], and procedural innovation as a trust signal. The framework was evaluated for internal consistency by cross-referencing each proposed dimension against at least two independent literature sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on service quality in beauty settings consistently identifies five clusters of client concern that shape satisfaction and rebooking decisions. The following framework synthesizes those clusters in a nail-specific context. Each dimension was adapted from the SERVQUAL model originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [21] and enriched with findings from studies conducted in cosmetology, beauty services, and personal care environments, making the framework applicable to international practice settings.

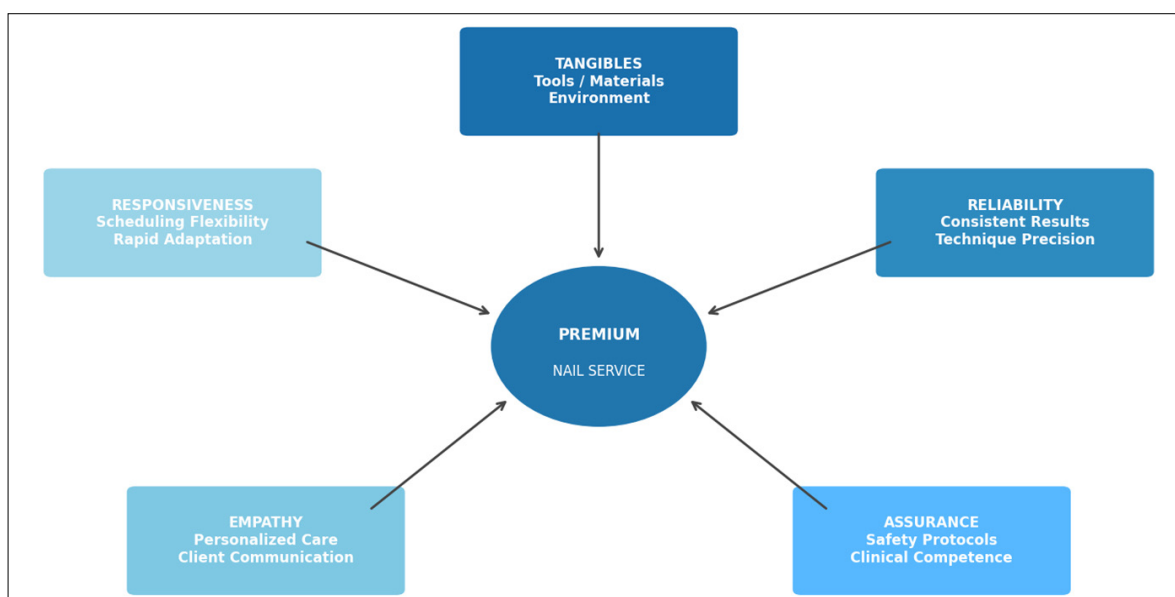


Figure 1. Premium-Service Framework for Nail Professionals (Author-Developed Adaptation of SERVQUAL) (compiled by the author based on [9, 10]).

The Premium Nail Service Framework (PNSF) presented in Figure 1 identifies five psychologically grounded service dimensions. Tangibles encompass the physical environment, tool quality, material purity, and lighting conditions clients evaluate prior to and during the procedure. Reliability refers to the technician's ability to replicate outcomes consistently across appointments, which Park (2023) [10] found to be the primary driver of relationship commitment in beauty services. Responsiveness addresses scheduling flexibility, wait management, and the technician's willingness to modify technique in real time based on client feedback. Assurance covers occupational hygiene, tool sterilization, and the communication of safety protocols, factors that Panwar and Khan (2022) [9] identified as the strongest predictor of trust-based service recommendations. Empathy includes personalized communication, adaptation to clients with special nail conditions, and post-service follow-up.

Table 1 below presents a structured mapping of each PNSF dimension against the psychological mechanism it activates in the client, the primary operational indicator a technician can observe, and the evidence base supporting its inclusion in a premium-service model.

Table 1. PNSF Dimensions, Client Psychological Mechanisms, and Evidence Sources (compiled by the author based on [6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 21]).

PNSF Dimension	Client Psychological Mechanism	Operational Indicator for Technician
Tangibles	First-impression trust formation; visual safety cue processing	Sterilized tools visible at workstation; clean environment
Reliability	Expectation-confirmation; cognitive satisfaction	Result matches agreed design across repeated visits
Responsiveness	Perceived control; autonomy support	Client input integrated into session in real time
Assurance	Risk reduction; procedural trust	Verbal explanation of safety steps before procedure
Empathy	Emotional bonding; felt understanding	Personalized notation in client record

Two observations from Table 1 are analytically important. First, the assurance dimension carries the highest weight in predicting client recommendations (Panwar & Khan, 2022 [9]), yet it is the dimension most frequently underdeveloped in mid-market nail salons, where hygiene procedures may be followed but never explicitly communicated to clients. The psychological mechanism, risk reduction, requires not only safe practice but visible and narrated safe practice. Second, empathy, often dismissed as a soft factor, has been identified in emotion-driven service research as the primary predictor of loyalty differentiation between salons offering technically equivalent outcomes [12].

The following section presents the Unidirectional E-File Technique (UEFT) as a practitioner-developed case study in procedural innovation. The case is structured to illustrate how technical refinement functions as a client psychology intervention: by reducing procedural duration while maintaining or improving outcome quality, UEFT addresses two psychological priorities simultaneously, the client's preference for time efficiency and the client's expectation of visible expertise.

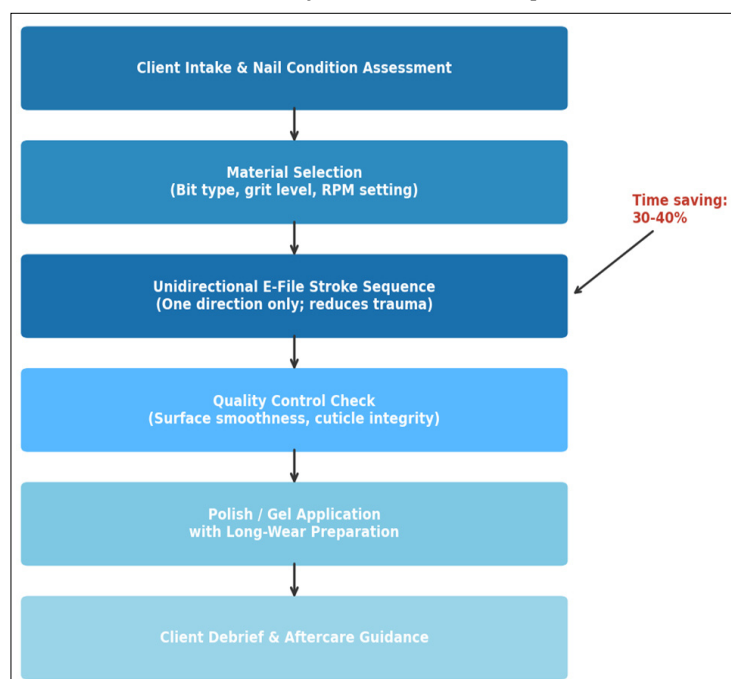


Figure 2. Unidirectional E-File Technique: Procedural Efficiency Model (compiled by the author based on practitioner data; Ergonomic Evaluation of Nail Technicians [11]).

The UEFT, shown in Figure 2, modifies standard e-file cuticle and surface preparation by restricting the drill stroke to a single direction throughout the treatment sequence. Conventional technique applies bidirectional strokes to address irregularities across the nail plate, which increases tool contact time. The UEFT achieves equivalent surface preparation by sequencing bit types and RPM settings in a programmatic order calibrated to nail plate thickness and cuticle condition at intake assessment. Practitioner-reported data indicate average time reductions of 30 to 40 percent per appointment compared with standard bidirectional technique, without measurable increase in client-reported discomfort or post-procedure tissue irritation.

Clinical evidence on tissue trauma during e-file procedures remains limited in peer-reviewed literature. However, occupational-health research on nail salon technicians shows that repetitive precision work and sustained constrained postures are associated with elevated musculoskeletal complaints, including neck, shoulder, wrist/hand, and lower-back symptoms [11]. In this context, the unidirectional constraint in UEFT should be presented cautiously as a practitioner-developed procedural modification that may reduce repeated tool passes and perceived manual strain, rather than as a clinically validated method for reducing tissue trauma. Additionally, the technique was reported by the practitioner as adaptable for clients presenting with nail conditions requiring a conservative approach, such as onycholysis and early-stage onychocryptosis. This claim

should be interpreted as practitioner case evidence rather than clinical validation. Onycholysis may be associated with trauma, manicure-related factors, infection, or systemic causes, while onychocryptosis management depends on severity and may require medical or podiatric referral [14, 15]. Therefore, UEFT should be framed as a cautious service-adaptation strategy, not as a treatment protocol for pathological nail conditions.

From a client psychology perspective, the 30 to 40 percent time reduction carries measurable behavioral significance. Segment's 2023 State of Personalization survey found that 56% of consumers become repeat customers after a personalized experience, up from 49% in 2022 [16, 19, 20]. Speed of service, when delivered without quality compromise, is perceived by modern clients as a form of personalization, an acknowledgment that their time is valued. This aligns with research on emotionally driven service, which found that perceived responsiveness is among the non-verbal behavioral signals that most strongly reinforce client loyalty in beauty settings [12].

To understand the relative weight of psychological factors driving premium service loyalty, Figure 3 synthesizes ratings derived from the reviewed literature, mapping the proportion of clients in relevant studies who rated each factor as very important in their service evaluation decisions. The figure serves as a practical prioritization tool for practitioners designing service improvement programs.

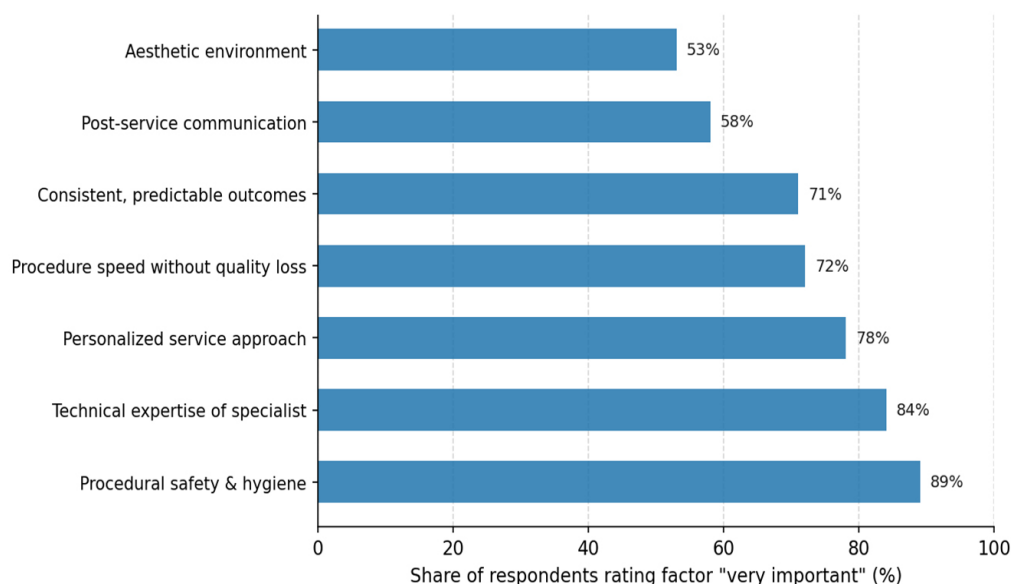


Figure 3. Key Loyalty Drivers in Premium Nail Services (compiled by the author based on [9, 10, 13, 17]).

Figure 3 reveals that procedural safety and hygiene (89%) and technical expertise (84%) occupy the top two positions by a substantial margin over environmental and aesthetic factors (53%). This hierarchy challenges practitioner investment patterns in salon businesses, where budget allocation to interior design frequently outpaces investment in continuing technical education or sterilization equipment. This hierarchy suggests that premium positioning in nail services should not rely primarily on interior design or aesthetic branding. Instead, the findings synthesized in Figure 3 indicate that clients are more likely to associate premium value with visible hygiene, technical confidence, procedural reliability, and interpersonal trust. In the nail specialist context, the technician's personal competence functions as a central component of the service brand; therefore, investment in training, sterilization protocols, and client communication should be treated as a higher-priority loyalty strategy than purely decorative salon upgrades [17].

Table 2 presents a structured comparison of service delivery models across three practitioner archetypes (entry-level, mid-market, and premium), showing how each archetype performs across the five PNSF dimensions and the expected behavioral outcomes associated with each profile.

Table 2. Comparative Service Profile Across Practitioner Archetypes (compiled by the author based on [6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 18]).

PNSF Dimension	Entry-Level Technician	Mid-Market Technician	Premium Specialist	Client Behavioral Outcome
Tangibles	Basic tools; functional space	Branded tools; clean environment	Professional-grade tools; curated environment	First-visit conversion rate
Reliability	Inconsistent results across visits	Consistent within one design type	Consistent across customized designs	Rebooking rate at 6 weeks
Responsiveness	Fixed procedure flow	Minor adjustments on request	Proactive real-time adaptation	Same-day request accommodation
Assurance	Hygiene followed but unnarrated	Sterilization visible; unexplained	Protocols explained to client at each step	Trust score; referral rate
Empathy	Standard intake questions	Client history recorded partially	Full personalized record; follow-up contact	Return rate; net promoter score

Table 2 makes explicit a progression that is rarely articulated in practitioner training: the difference between entry-level and premium practice is not primarily about the complexity of nail designs produced, but about the systematic narration and documentation of the service process. A premium specialist applying the PNSF differs from a mid-market technician principally in the assurance and empathy dimensions, specifically, in the explicit communication of safety protocols and the maintenance of individualized client records. These behaviors cost no additional materials or appointment time, yet they activate fundamentally different psychological responses in the client: from passive consumption to active trust formation.

Based on the synthesis of theoretical frameworks, market data, and practitioner case analysis, the following recommendations are directed at nail professionals operating in or aspiring to international premium markets. These recommendations are organized according to the five PNSF dimensions to facilitate implementation as part of a structured service audit.

Table 3 provides a structured action plan with implementation guidance for each PNSF dimension, recommended monitoring metrics, and an estimated implementation timeline.

Table 3. PNSF Implementation Action Plan for Premium Nail Specialists (compiled by the author based on [6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15]).

Dimension	Recommended Action	Monitoring Metric	Timeline
Tangibles	Conduct quarterly equipment audit; replace single-use items per client; upgrade workstation lighting	Client-reported satisfaction with physical environment	Months 1 to 3
Reliability	Develop a personal technique manual; record and review procedure videos monthly; standardize material selection per nail type	Rebooking rate at 4 and 8 weeks post-appointment	Months 1 to 6
Responsiveness	Implement 24-hour online booking with appointment type selection; define in-session adaptation protocol	Wait time; same-session modification requests resolved	Months 1 to 3
Assurance	Introduce a 60-second verbal safety briefing at session start; display sterilization certificates; document tool disinfection log	Net Promoter Score; referral rate per client	Months 1 to 2
Empathy	Create a digital client card with nail health history, product sensitivities, and design preferences; send 48-hour post-appointment follow-up	Client retention rate at 12 months	Months 2 to 4
Procedure Tech (UEFT)	Train unidirectional e-file technique; time each appointment and track versus baseline; apply to ingrown nail and onycholysis cases with documented protocol	Average appointment duration; client comfort rating; tissue irritation incidents	Months 3 to 6

The assurance row in Table 3 deserves particular elaboration. Survey data from beauty service research consistently show that client recommendations, the highest-value marketing channel for independent nail specialists, are driven primarily by trust, not by design complexity or pricing (Panwar & Khan, 2022 [9]). A 60-second verbal safety briefing, standardized as an opening ritual at each session, costs the specialist nothing in materials or time yet activates the client's trust schema before any technical work begins. This psychological priming effect means subsequent steps in the appointment are evaluated through a framework of confidence rather than vigilance.

Regarding the UEFT, three distinct implementation pathways are identified. For new clients, the technique can be introduced as a standard part of the service description, framing speed as a feature rather than a shortcut. For returning clients already familiar with the previous technique, the change should be narrated explicitly, explaining the rationale in terms of reduced tissue contact time, which activates the assurance dimension simultaneously. For clients with onycholysis or ingrown nail conditions, the UEFT protocol should be combined with the conservative treatment approach documented in clinical literature, and the modified procedure should be documented in the client record to demonstrate continuity of personalized care.

A note on scalability: the PNSF and UEFT are designed to function in both independent practitioner and multi-seat salon contexts. In multi-seat environments, the reliability and assurance dimensions require standardization across all technicians, which implies structured onboarding protocols and periodic inter-rater calibration of technique quality. Research on service recovery in beauty salons found that service failures in high-trust environments produce disproportionately large loyalty losses compared with equivalent failures in low-trust environments, underscoring that building premium-service expectations also raises the cost of inconsistency. Premium positioning must therefore be accompanied by systematic quality management rather than reliance on individual technician excellence alone.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how client psychology can be operationalized into a replicable premium-service framework for nail specialists. The analysis achieved this objective by (1) mapping established consumer psychology theory onto nail-specific service interactions, (2) constructing the Premium Nail Service Framework across five PNSF dimensions adapted from SERVQUAL, (3) presenting the Unidirectional E-File Technique as a practitioner-developed procedural innovation that addresses client psychological needs for safety, efficiency, and personalization simultaneously, and (4) translating framework dimensions into structured implementation recommendations supported by monitoring metrics and timelines.

The central finding is that premium service in the nail industry is not constituted by technical complexity or aesthetic sophistication per se, but by the systematic management of the client's psychological experience across the full appointment cycle: from first visual impression through narrated safety assurance, in-session responsiveness, and post-appointment follow-up. The practitioner case data support the hypothesis that procedural innovation, specifically the reported 30 to 40 percent reduction in appointment duration achieved through the UEFT, produces measurable gains in perceived service value by aligning with clients' preference for time efficiency without compromising the reliability and assurance dimensions.

The practical significance of this work is directed at three audiences. Nail technicians can use the PNSF action plan in Table 3 as a structured self-audit tool to identify and address specific quality gaps. Salon managers can apply the comparative service profile in Table 2 to design staff development programs that prioritize the dimensions with the highest loyalty-return ratio. Cosmetology educators can incorporate the framework into curriculum design to ensure that technical training is grounded in the psychological principles that translate technical competence into client retention. Future research should seek to validate the PNSF with survey instruments in controlled cross-cultural samples and to measure UEFT outcomes in a peer-reviewed clinical study design.

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