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Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Investigation of Telecom Users in Chitwan

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Abstract

This study investigate the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality in regard to the telecom sector in Nepal in terms of reliability, price fairness, signal strength, responsiveness and coverage with a particular focus to the Chitwan district. A standardized questionnaire was used to collect data among 384 Nepal Telecom (NTC) and Ncell subscribers. The analysis was done by using SPSS and both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed, Cronbach alpha was applied to verify the reliability of the measurement scales.

Four service quality measures were significantly positively correlated with customer satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). Regression findings showed that the pricing fairness did not significantly affect the customer satisfaction in the Nepalese telecom market, but reliability, strength of signal, responsiveness, and coverage were most influential. In order to enhance customer satisfaction telecom providers must consider improving network reliability and coverage, customer responsiveness through customer service, and fair pricing policies. This study contributes localized information to managerial decision making in the emerging markets and bridges an empirical research gap on the association between service quality and customer satisfaction in Nepal telecom industry in chitwan.

Keywords Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Telecommunication, Nepal, SERVQUAL
JEL Classification – M31, L96, C12

Introduction

Telecommunication is the process of transmitting information through cable, radio, and optical systems (Arokiasamy & Abdullah, 2013). This is due to the rising use of mobile phones and telecom services that have enabled voice conversations, text messaging, sharing of multimedia and access to the internet. In some countries, such as Nepal, which is not well developed, the industry plays a crucial role in the everyday life and economic growth. It is commonplace that service quality in the telecommunications business is a key determinant of customer happiness and loyalty which subsequently leads to retention and positive word of mouth (Danaker, 1997).

Research has shown that higher levels of service quality are constantly raising the level

of customer happiness. Responsiveness, coverage, signal strength, price fairness and reliability are important attributes that have been identified to influence the consumer perceptions significantly (Johnston, 1994; Mouawad & Kleiner, 1996). These factors are critical to comprehend in Nepal due to the increasing rate of mobile penetration in Nepal and the increasing customer demands. As previous studies pointed out, exceptionally good service quality also offers a competitive advantage to businesses in competitive marketplaces besides raising the happiness among customers (Ghost & Gnanadhas, 2011; Hazlina, 2011).

This research is meant to bridging this knowledge gap in terms of the relationship between customer happiness and service quality in telecom industry in chitwan. Many studies use SERVQUAL dimensions (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) broadly. However, which dimensions matter most for telecom users in chitwan is still unanswered.

Literature Review and Framework

Literature Review

The recent research of the features of service quality and their influence on customer satisfaction within the telecom sector of Nepal indicates the extent to which the SERVQUAL framework can be applied. Besides the fundamental SERVQUAL attributes, research has found that such aspects as price equity, trustworthiness, and service commitment are critical customer satisfaction and loyalty predictors (Shrestha & Dongol, 2024). Altogether, these findings have shown that emphasis should be placed on both conventional dimensions of SERVQUAL and the factors that are situation-specific, such as security and pricing equity to shape consumer perceptions. Customer satisfaction and measures of service quality are highly positively related, with the greatest significance of the security element, then comes tangibles, assurance, and empathy (Sah & Pokharel, 2021). As it is claimed by a study conducted by Shrestha and Ale (2019), the overall customer satisfaction levels among the users of Nepal Telecom are affected positively and significantly by the five SERVQUAL dimensions, namely, the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

The study area by Saha et al. (2016) is the customer satisfaction of mobile phone subscribers in Bangladesh. In the study, the results showed that price, quality of network, variety of products and services to subscribers are some of the factors that influence consumer satisfaction in mobile telecommunication business. Uddin et al. (2014) reviewed the impact of market factors on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction had positive relations with perceived quality, perceived value, and market factor. This research indicates that variables have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The satisfaction of the customers depends on the image and the perceived value addition to the clients of the telecom service provider. Anand and Selvaraj (2012) studied the relationship between service quality and client loyalty and satisfaction in

the Indian banking industry. The mean score of reliability was the lowest among the five elements of the quality of service considered, but assurance has the highest. In his study, Ojo (2010) was able to analyze the relationship between the customer happiness and the quality of service in the African telecommunication industry focusing on the case of Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN) in Nigeria. The study shows that customer satisfaction correlates with service quality at a positive level.

Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) examined factors that lead to customer satisfaction and service quality which in turn lead to customer loyalty in the mobile phone industry in Greece. As per the findings of the study, the areas in the service quality that have a more positive effect on the customer satisfaction are in the form of customer service, price structure, and billing system. Negi (2009) examined the service excellence and customer satisfaction. The most significant features of the total service quality to determine include reliability and network quality, as per the study. In their study, Al Tamimi and Al Amiri (2003) examined the relationship between customer happiness and service quality. Dependability according to the study was the most important factor in customer satisfaction.

Many studies have been done to establish the impact of service quality to customer satisfaction in telecommunication industries around the globe. Based on this, this study also identifies how the quality factors of services affect the telecommunications industries among Nepalese consumers in a bid to establish the presence or absence of similar findings.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to establish the influence of service quality aspect, including the coverage, responsiveness, signal strength, the price fairness, and reliability, on the customer satisfaction. The research is believed to bridge the gaps by researching on the elements of the quality of service and their influence on customer satisfaction of the telecommunication industry in Chitwan.

Conceptual framework

Key independent variables of previous research on the pleasure of telecom customers

The conceptual framework of this study consists of Reliability, Price Fairness, Signal Strength, Responsiveness, and Coverage. As the researches of such researchers as Loke et al. (2011), Negi (2009), and Jamal and Naser (2003) show, reliability is a very important aspect of service quality that influences customer satisfaction significantly. The other important aspect is price fairness as it has been shown to have a direct influence on consumer satisfaction by perceived value in a price system and fairness in price systems as found in studies by Muzammil et al. (2010), Gustafsson et al. (2005), and Voss et al. (1998). The signal strength is not the only concept that is compatible with the broader concept of network quality, which is highlighted by Negi (2009) and Saha et al. (2016) as a determinant of user happiness but not explicitly mentioned in other studies. Wassenaar et al. (2005) and Loke et al. (2011) focus on responsiveness and find

that the timely and effective service recovery has a positive impact on the customer perceptions. Finally, Uddin et al. (2014) also address the role of service availability to influence the satisfaction of users and indirectly confirm the idea of coverage, being related to service availability and accessibility. This conceptual framework was developed through real research.

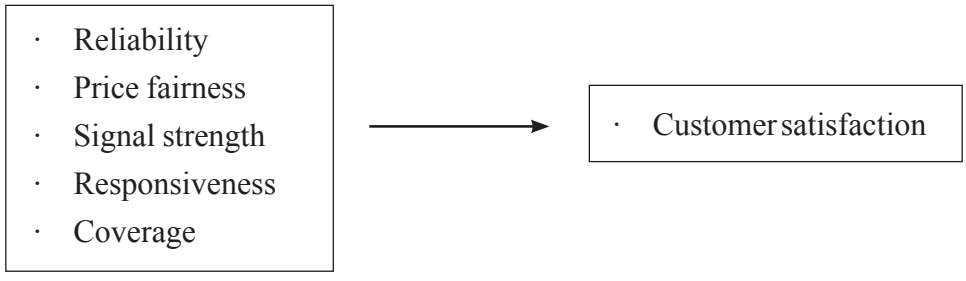

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework, developed in this study based on various Literature

Table 1. Summary of Variables

Studies	Variables
Loke et al. (2011), Negi (2009), and Jamal and Naser (2003)	Reliability
Muzammil et al. (2010), Gustafsson et al. (2005), and Voss et al. (1998)	Price fairness
Negi (2009) and Saha et al. (2016)	Signal strength
Wassenaar et al. (2005) and Loke et al. (2011)	Responsiveness
Uddin et al. (2014)	Coverage
Agyapong (2010), Ojo (2010), and Taylor and Baker (1994)	Customer Satisfaction

Operational Definition of the Variables

Independent Variables: These are the variables that are not influenced by any other factors.

Reliability: Loke et al. (2011) define reliability in telecom services as the ability to provide a stable connectivity and the level of promised performance. Service quality is an essential aspect of reliability because the customer requires the service providers to offer quality reliability of the network that is not riddled with frequent interruptions (Negi, 2009). Dependability also leads to higher customer satisfaction by minimizing error of service and establishing provider trust according to research (Jamal and Naser, 2003). This leads to the fact that reliability is fundamental in the establishment of customer satisfaction in the telecom sector.

Price fairness: Price fairness is an indicator that shows the perception of customers regarding the relationship between the cost of telecom services and the quality of

services provided (Muzammil et al., 2010). Research studies have revealed that in case consumers make comparisons to those of competitors as well as perceived benefits, unjust pricing is likely to cause dissatisfaction (Gustafsson et al., 2005). Voss et al. (1998) demand that competitive and open pricing makes customers feel special thus satisfaction and churn is low. Moreover, the perceived price fairness is also a major factor in the retention strategies because it mediates between the quality of services and customer satisfaction (Herrmann et al., 2007). Thus, it is necessary to provide telecom providers with an optimal balance between prices and quality of services to guarantee the high rates of customer satisfaction.

Signal strength: Signal strength is a major factor of the quality of the network since it influences stability, clarity of the call, internet speed, and overall connection (Negi, 2009). The weak signals lead to frequent failures of calls or slow data transfer that makes customers very annoyed (Saha et al., 2016). The user experience and happiness are greatly supported by strong network coverage, as was found in the emerging countries (Uddin et al., 2014). Telecom companies have to invest in infrastructure to ensure the highest achievable signal strength and minimize instances of interruption in services.

Responsiveness: Responsiveness defines the speed and efficiency that telecom companies respond to client complaints and service requests (Wassenaar et al., 2005). Problem-solving is a great way of satisfying customers and demonstrates that a company cares about its customers (Loke et al., 2011). Research indicates that unsolved issues or delay in responding leads to dissatisfaction and increases the chances of losing customers (Ojo, 2010). Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) argue that effective service characterized by a timely troubleshooting process and open line communications builds trust and develops long-term loyalty.

Coverage: The limited coverage limits the accessibility and customers remain unhappy with the service since they tend to have dead zones (Uddin et al., 2014). Research indicates that the coverage is a key factor that consumers put into consideration when deciding on a provider since it has a direct effect on convenience and usability (Saha et al., 2016). Therefore, the telecom firms have to constantly enhance and enlarge their network systems to fulfill the expectation of the customers and maintain the satisfaction.

Dependent Variable

Customer satisfaction: In the telecommunications industry, customer satisfaction as a measure of overall customer satisfaction with the quality of the service is a key performance indicator (Agyapong, 2010). Pricing, network performance as well as dependability are some of the variables that contribute significantly to this statistic (Taylor & Baker, 1994). Akbar and Alnazer (2009) say that consumers who are happy is retained hence reducing attrition and increasing the revenues. Favourable word-of-

mouth and prolonged brand loyalty are also associated with high levels of satisfaction as research indicates (Ojo, 2010). Telecom companies have to constantly evaluate and improve their service features in order to keep their clients happy in the very competitive industry.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive and causal research design to explore the relationship between the variables of customer satisfaction and service quality in the Nepalese telecommunications sector. Thorough information about the factors influencing customer satisfaction was collected through descriptive method, whereas the causal design made it possible to investigate the impact of coverage, responsiveness, signal strength, price fairness and dependability. It was carried out in the Chitwan district with the customers of two leading telecom companies in Nepal: Nepal Telecom (NTC) and Ncell as the target customers. The telecommunications customers those who using services were not fixed so, 384 respondents were purposively selected to adequate sample size based on Cochran formula, which ensured that all the demographic factors, including age, gender, and income, were represented. Primary data on customer perceptions of service quality were collected on a self-administered, structured questionnaire. Secondary data was collected using journals, papers and the relevant literature to strengthen the findings. The instrument reliability was confirmed using Cronbach alpha; a level higher than the acceptable amount meant that the tool was consistent in its measure. Validity was determined by expert reviews to ensure that the questionnaire was assessing the desired elements of service quality in the right manner. Data were processed using SPSS software to determine the relationship and influences among variables by applying such statistical methods as descriptive statistics and inferential tests such as regression, ANOVA, and correlation.

Results and Discussion

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables/Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	174	45.31
Male	210	54.68
Age Groups		
16-20	27	7.03
21-29	237	61.71
30-39	109	28.38
40-49	3	0.78
50 and above	8	2.08

Education		
Postgraduate	122	31.77
Graduate	170	44.27
Undergraduate	76	19.79
Up to intermediate	16	4.17
Occupation		
Student	158	41.14
Businessperson	48	12.5
Service Holder	100	26.04
Others	78	20.31
Income Level		
Below 15000	99	25.78
16000-25000	50	13.02
26000-35000	48	12.5
36000-45000	58	15.10
Above 46000	129	33.59
Using Mobile Network		
NTC	231	60.15
Ncell	55	14.32
Both	98	25.52
Time Period of Use of Mobile Networks		
Less than 5 years	55	14.32
5-8 years	103	26.82
9-13 years	112	29.17
More than 13 years	114	29.68

The above Table 2 indicates the gender distribution of respondents as 54.68 per cent males and 45.31 per cent females. On the same note, a large percentage of the respondents, 237, or 61.71 of the total are aged 21- 29. In addition, 27 (7.03) respondents had their ages in the range of 16 to 20, 109 (28.38) in the range of 30 to 39, 3 (0.78) in the range of 40 to 49, and 8 (2.08) had ages that were above 50. A large percentage of the academic qualification of the respondents consisted of graduate students (170, or 44.27%), postgraduate students (122, or 31.77%), undergraduate students (76, or 19.79%), and intermediate students (16, or 4.17%). The employment status of the respondents is shown below; 158 (41.14) students, 100 (26.04) service holders, 48 (12.5) business owners and 78 (20.31) others. On the same note, 129 (33.59) respondents had a greater income of more than 46,000, 50 (13.22) respondents had a greater income of 16,000 to

25,000, 48 (12.5) had a greater income of 26,000 to 35,000, and 99 (25.78) had a greater income of less than 15,000. Also out of the 384 respondents, 231 (60.15) use NTC networks, 55 (14.32) use Ncell mobile, and 98 (25.52) use both the mobile networks. Finally, the number of respondents who have been using mobile cellular networks less than five years was 55 (14.32%). On the same note, 103 respondents (26.82) have been using mobile cellular networks between five and eight years. On the same note there have been 114 respondents (29.68) who have been using mobile telecom networks over a span of 13 and above years and 112 respondents (29.17) who have been using them over a period of 9-13 years.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis for Overall Variables

	Minimum	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
R	1.00	5.00	3.87	.582
P	1.00	5.00	3.66	.646
S	1.00	5.00	3.79	.683
Re	1.00	5.00	3.85	.651
C	1.00	5.00	3.58	.711
CS	1.00	5.00	3.60	.721

Note: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 descriptive statistics showed that respondents rated highest to lowest that the reliability (M=3.87, SD=0.58), responsiveness (M=3.85, SD=0.65), Signal Strengths (M= 3.79, SD=0.68), price fairness (M=3.66, SD=0.64), customer satisfaction (M=3.60, SD=0.72) and coverage (M=3.58, SD=0.71) respectively.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Test for both independent and dependent variables

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Statements**
0.763 (Reliability)	4
0.705 (Price fairness)	4
0.751 (Signal Strength)	4
0.757 (Responsiveness)	4
0.714 (Coverage)	4
0.847 (Customer Satisfaction)	4

Note: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 shows the value of Cronbach Alpha of all the independent and dependent variables. The acceptable internal consistency (0.763) of reliability, (0.705) price,

(0.751) signal strength (0.757) of responsiveness (0.714) coverage and (0.847) customer satisfaction. The Cronbach's value of each constructs was higher than 0.7, which indicates the data reliability that is most common accepted value in the social science research.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis

	R	P	S	Re	C	CS
R	1					
P	.541**	1			.	
	.000					
S	.549**	.538**	1			
	.000	.000				
Re	.592**	.407**	.566**	1		
	.000	.000	.000			
C	.517**	.332**	.571**	.619**	1	
	.000	.000	.000	.000		
CS	.594**	.437**	.597**	.688**	.760**	1
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 depicts the correlation of all independent variables and dependent variable at 1 percent level of significant ($p < 0.01$). Reliability (R) and Customer Satisfaction (CS) were most correlated ($r = 0.760$) and significant. Similarly, Price fairness and CS ($r = 0.688$), Signal Strength (S) and CS ($r = 0.597$), Coverage (C) and CS ($r = 0.594$) and Responsiveness (Re) and CS ($r = 0.437$) has significant associations. There was a significant positive correlation among the variables.

Table 6. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	136.109	5	27.222	162.542	.000[b]
	Residual	63.305	378	.167		
	Total	199.414	383			

a. Dependent Variable: CS

b. Predictors: (Constant), C, P, R, S, Re

Table 6 indicates the goodness of model fit by indicating that the predictors have a significant value i.e F statistics ($p<0.000$).

Table 7. Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.372	.158		-2.358	.019		
	R	.146	.050	.118	2.901	.004	.508	1.967
	P	.078	.041	.070	1.896	.059	.620	1.613
	S	.088	.043	.083	2.029	.043	.498	2.007
	Re	.275	.046	.249	6.011	.000	.491	2.035
	C	.482	.040	.475	11.942	.000	.531	1.884
R= 0.826		R^2= 0.683		S.E.= 0.409				

a. Dependent Variable: CS

Table 7 exhibitions coefficient values of regression R^2 = 0.683 indicating that the independent variables influence dependent variable by 68.30 percent, with a good multiple correlation i.e R = 0.826. A standard error of 0.409 indicates a respectable level of predicted accuracy. Customer satisfaction is most significantly predicted by Coverage (β = 0.482, p <.001) and Responsiveness (β = 0.275, p <.001), followed by Reliability (β = 0.146, p =.004) and Service Quality (β = 0.088, p =.043). There was insignificant impact of price fairness and customer satisfaction (β = 0.078, p =.059). There was not Multi collinearity exists on both Tolerance and VIF.

Discussion

The findings aligned with the assumption of a positive effect of dependability on customer satisfaction that were consistent with previous studies that point to consistent service performance as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction (Loke et al., 2011; Negi, 2009). Signal strength and responsiveness were also reported to have significant advantages, which confirm the findings of earlier research (Wassenaar et al., 2005; Santouridis & Trivellas, 2010) that indicates the importance of network quality and speedy service recovery to customer retention. Uddin et al. (2014) made this conclusion since wide network accessibility is imperative in the telecom industry, especially in areas lacking sufficient infrastructure as indicated by coverage.

The present study proved that fairness of prices did not significantly influence consumer happiness in spite of the earlier study in which fair pricing was associated with customer loyalty (Muzammil et al., 2010; Gustafsson et al., 2005). Future investigations may analyze possible adjusters such as income levels or better measure the pricing fairness so that insight may be given on this relationship. The accepted theories are supported by the verified hypotheses by highlighting the importance of coverage, responsiveness, and dependability as the primary determinants of telecom satisfaction, a hypothesis that is implied by the Service Quality Satisfaction Loyalty framework (Parasuraman et al.,

1988). Conversely, the minor role played by price fairness challenges the wisdom of the tome meaning that in competitive or price-controlled market places, non-financial aspects may predominate in respect of cost factor. To enhance the overall satisfaction, telecommunication companies ought to effectively focus on network growth (coverage) and reliability of the services as they tailor responsiveness strategies, such as the round-the-clock customer care services.

Summary

The present research utilized the responses of 384 respondents and quantitative techniques such as ANOVA, regression, correlation, and descriptive analysis to determine the impacts of five dimensions of service quality in Chitwan telecom industry on customer satisfaction, including coverage, responsiveness, signal strength, price fairness, and reliability. Customers placed a lot of value on consistency in connection and reliability of the service and the findings revealed that the coverage and reliability of the network was of the utmost importance to the customers. Price justice, responsiveness, and signal strength also contributed to satisfaction although not as much as other factors and therefore there is an opportunity to improve them. Regression and correlation analysis indicated that price fairness did not make significant contributions to consumer happiness.

Finally, the findings can confirm that customer happiness is directly influenced by the factors of reliability, signal strengths, responsiveness and coverage but not by the price.

Conclusion

The study concludes that customer satisfaction within the telecom sector of Chitwan depends on a number of dimensions of service quality, the most notable of which were reliability and coverage. Even though the influence of signal strength, and responsiveness has a comparatively smaller impact, it is essential to retain positive perceptions and loyalty. The findings highlight the importance of telecom companies to concentrate on the provision of reliable service and large coverage as well as ensuring fair prices, good signal strength, and prompt customer service. With the changing consumer demands and competition with advancement in technology, continuous assessment and improvement of these quality aspects of service, are critical to customer retention and long term loyalty, which can offer practical information to both the stakeholders of a particular industry and policy-makers.

Future studies need to extend the area to include more provincial and demographic differences in consumer perceptions. A mixed-method design approach, which would entail the integration of quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews would be a good way of gaining deeper understanding of subjective variables like emotional brand attachment and dissatisfaction as a result of unmet expectations. Furthermore, longitudinal research may investigate the role of new technologies such as 5G and fiber

optics on views of the service quality in the long term. Inter-rater comparisons between telecom providers and market segment would also determine the best practices and competitive gaps.

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