

# Measuring Service Quality in the Travel and Tourism Industry in Nepal

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## Abstract

This study examines measuring service quality in travel and tourism in Nepal. Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable. The selected independent variables are staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, and service innovation. The primary source of data is used to assess the opinions of respondents regarding staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, service innovation, and customer satisfaction. The study is based on primary data of 119 respondents. To achieve the purpose of the study, structured questionnaire is prepared. The correlation and multiple regression models are estimated to test the significance and importance of service quality in travel and tourism in Nepal.

The study shows that staff training is positively correlated to customer satisfaction indicating that higher the staff training, higher will be the customer satisfaction. Likewise, infrastructure are positively correlated to the customer satisfaction indicating that higher the infrastructure, higher will be the customer satisfaction. Similarly, customer feedback mechanism is positively correlated to customer satisfaction indicating that better customer feedback mechanism lead to increase in customer satisfaction. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. This implies supportive cultural sensitivity leads to increase in customer satisfaction. However, service innovation is positively correlated to the improvement customer satisfaction. It shows that proper service innovation leads to improve in tourism of Nepal.

**Keywords:** staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, service innovation, customer satisfaction

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## 1. Introduction

Measuring service quality in the travel and tourism industry involves a multifaceted approach aimed at ensuring customer satisfaction and identifying areas for enhancement. Proper handling of customer complaints can contribute significant percentages to the profit of the company (Brown, 2000). Similarly, Han and Hyun (2015) stated that how perceived service quality, satisfaction, trust, and perceived price reasonableness were related to intentions to revisit Korea as a medical care destination. Since the beginning of 2018, the tourism authority has been developing a marketing plan for. There is a border checkpoint that enables easy access to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, allowing for additional development and expansion of the tremendous tourism potential (Chaigassem & Tunming, 2019).

Cultural tourism is one of the tourism types that has proven popular with travelers and is based on their specific interests (Chaigassem & Tunming, 2019). Likewise, Beladi *et al.* (2019) found that empirically estimated the annual growth rate of GDP per capita from the health and wellness tourism market by using a time-series approach. The study promotes and encourages tourism in the region, as well as the Northeast's social and economic growth (Rich & Franck, 2016).

According to Fourie and Sanana-Gallego (2011), tourism service industry is accepted as an international growing pioneer among service industries. Likewise, Coshall and Charlesworth (2011) stated that the demand for tourism will reach one billion people per

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year by 2020. Due to having positive social, cultural and economic effects tourism turned into the first sector in the world in a way that many countries attempt to benefit from the industry through providing appropriate infrastructure and background and intending to reach and satisfy tourists' insistent demand (Amiri and Momeni, 2011). Many countries thereby discern tourism as a significant source of commercial activities, income, employment and international exchanges (Haber and Lerner, 1998).

Li *et al.* (2008) stated that it is fairly accepted that repeat visitors enjoy holiday destination for either aesthetic reasons who visit sentimentally, memorably, with a sense of belonging or utilitarian reasons that gain a better knowledge of the geographic area for selected activities (or both). Similarly, Gitelson and Cromton (1984) stated that repurchase intentions of a product and brand are thereby highly recognized in customer behavior research. However, Bigne *et al.* (2001) stated that it is difficult to measure revisit intention to a destination since it is a sector in which consumption is infrequent and on occasions, tourists prefer to visit new places. Similarly, research on repeat business has focused on repurchase intentions of products rather than services (Kozak, 2001). The major stream of previous research in this area is related to the satisfaction construct and its antecedents, with revisit intention regarded as a consequence of a tourist satisfaction model (Bigne *et al.*, 2001).

According to Formica (2002), success or failure of a destination image could solely depend on perceptions of tourists. Furthermore, Atilgan *et al.* (2003) stated that service quality of a destination image can influence repeat visitations, contributing to increased employment and modern infrastructure. Based on previous empirical researches the researcher found that destination image, word of mouth and satisfaction were significant influence on tourist to revisit intention (Akroush *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Zurub *et al.* (2015) found that the majority of developed economies consider tourism a fundamental industry for their economic growth because it depends on other productive sectors making the infrastructure of a zone and cycling its economic wheel.

According to Oliver (1997), consumer interpretation of service quality is associated with their expectations and perceptions of excellence. Similarly, Bigne *et al.* (2001) pointed that destination image forms individual expectations before the visit and affects how customers perceive quality. Moreover, Chen and Tsai (2007) found that a marketing perspective asserted that having a favorable destination image would affect an individuals' trip quality. It is thereby coherent that there is a relationship between awareness of the destination when a person has access to informal information such as word of mouth.

Allsop *et al.* (2007) found that communication such as word of mouth can persuade by reason and motivate by emotion. Therefore, prior to visiting destination word of mouth is an important source which has an impact on tourist visitation. Cronin and Taylor (1992) reported that customer satisfaction is a solid predictor of word of mouth i.e. behavioral intentions than service quality. Oliver (1999) argued that customer satisfaction is the channel between service quality and word of mouth i.e. behavioral intention.

Guntoro and Hui (2013) asserted that the general satisfaction of tourists is formed through their evaluation of destination features based on their expectations and is a significant factor in tourists' intention to revisit a destination. Similarly, Alegre and Garau (2010) found that tourists' tenderness about a destination image encompass destination features from their viewpoints. Previous research has shown that satisfaction influences revisit of tourism destinations.

Lai *et al.* (2009) found that destination image has both direct and indirect effects on customer satisfaction. Some studies have asserted that destination image will also have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. Measurement of tourist satisfaction at the destination level has been widely explored by tourism researchers, practitioners and policymakers (Chi and Qu, 2009). Similarly, Assaker *et al.* (2011) found that destination image impacts revisits and influences future return intention. Likewise, Westbrook (1987) found that a complex arrangement of strategies is needed to ensure that service employees are willing and able to deliver quality services and that they stay motivated to perform well. Managers who really value employees make their improvement a main concern and show this by their active involvement in the orientation and training process (Tiwari, 2011).

Hogg *et al.* (2014) when providing information about attractions or destinations more generally. Research has also attempted to model sensitivity in terms of cultural competencies and their cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. Similarly, Yu *et al.* (2001) situate cultural awareness and knowledge primarily in the cognitive domain. Cultural sensitivity in this vein is conceptualized as an outcome of learning and development: it is a desired competence that one can attain and enhance. Likewise, Kirmayer (2012) found that cultural competences can be expected from everyone who engages with cultural differences. While the convention in tourism is that those serving and guiding others must be culturally sensitive (Aikio, 2018). It is not only the responsibility of hosts to develop a culturally sensitive orientation. In tourism, the onus of being culturally sensitive ought also to be assumed by tourists, developers, marketing organizations, and researchers (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). The study agrees with those who approach cultural sensitivity as a facet of one's identity construction or worldview; that is, as a disposition that can be enhanced and mobilized through reflection on one's own pre-assumptions, cultural norms and values (Hurst *et al.*, 2020).

Mazanec *et al.* (2007) found that the competitiveness of a tourism destination is seen as the ability of that destination to provide services, memorable experience and customer satisfaction; and consequently, to increase the likelihood of revisit and create more profit for that destination. Similarly, Guntoro and Hui (2013) found that tourists' revisit intention solely depends on their satisfaction derived from destination. Likewise, Akroush *et al.* (2016) found that the factors that play a mediating role of destination image from perspectives of the international tourists.

In the context of Nepal, tourism in Nepal was initiated since the time of composition of Veda around before 3500 BC. This was a time when many foreign tourists left the country and several others cancelled their bookings. It caused a severe financial blow to the national economy (Thapa, 2018). The formal growth of accommodation facilities in Nepal started with the establishment of Royal Hotel by a Russian national, (Shrestha & Jeong, 2016). The unplanned tourism activities can pollute nature and cultural environment as much as it influences the social and economic life styles in the host country (Shrestha and Shrestha, 2000).

Neupane and Devkota (2022) found that most of the tourists in Nepal come to see the natural beauty like flora and fauna, mountains, rivers etc. and cultural heritage site like temple, iskon, gumba etc. Bhattarai and Prompanyo (2022) found that visitors must be provided with appropriate situations to express their matter of discomfort and match the expectations that they are seeking. Bhattacharya *et al.* (2023) found that an operational study on management provides us with a clear understanding of the quality of tourism services

in a straightforward manner without the need for quantitative data, which will be useful in proper tourism and hospitality service planning and management. Badal (2019) found that insufficient infrastructures, inadequate investments, limited connectivity and weak national carriers, poor coordination among government agencies, scarcity of resources and marketing. Tiwari (2011) found that there is positive economic impact of tourism industry in Nepalese economy.

The above discussion shows that empirical evidences vary greatly across the studies on the measuring service quality of travel and tourism. Though there are above mentioned empirical evidences in the context of other countries and in Nepal, no such findings using more recent data exist in the context of Nepal. Therefore, in order to support one view or the other, this study has been conducted.

The major objective of the study is to measure service quality of travel and tourism in Nepal. Specifically, it examines the relationship staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, service innovation with customer satisfaction in travel and tourism.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: section two describes the sample, data, and methodology. Section three presents the empirical results and final section draws the conclusion.

## 2. Methodological aspects

The study is based on the primary data which were collected from 119 respondents through questionnaire. The respondents' views were collected on staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, service innovation and customer satisfaction in travel and tourism. This study is based on descriptive as well as causal comparative research designs.

### *The model*

The model estimated in this study assumes that customer satisfaction depends upon measuring service of travel and tourism. The dependent variable selected for the study is customer satisfaction. Similarly, the independent variables are staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, and service innovation. Therefore, the model to be estimated in this study is stated as follows:

Customer satisfaction =  $f$  (staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity, service innovation)

More specifically,

$$CS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ST + \beta_2 I + \beta_3 CFM + \beta_4 CSS + \beta_5 SI + e$$

Where,

ST = Staff training

I = Infrastructure

CSM = Customer feedback mechanism

CSS = Cultural sensitivity

SI = Service innovation

CS = Customer satisfaction

Staff training was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The staff members I interacted with during my visit to Nepal were well-trained”, “The training provided to staff members adequately prepared them to meet the needs of tourists” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.740$ ).

Infrastructure was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The convenience and efficiency of transportation systems (public transportation, taxis, etc.) contributed to my positive experience in Nepal”, “The quality of tourist infrastructure (information centers, signage, etc.) facilitated my navigation and exploration of Nepal’s attractions” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.879$ ).

Customer feedback mechanism were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The implementation of customer suggestions and improvements based on feedback contributed to my overall satisfaction with the tourist experience in Nepal”, “The transparency and openness in handling customer feedback by businesses in Nepal positively impacted my perception of their service quality”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.807$ ).

Cultural sensitivity competence was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The incorporation of local traditions and customs into tourist experiences enhanced the authenticity and enjoyment of my visit to Nepal”, “The efforts made by businesses in Nepal to accommodate cultural preferences and sensitivities contributed to my positive perception of their service quality” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.802$ ).

Service innovation was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The availability of unique and experiential services, such as guided virtual tours or cultural workshops, enriched my travel experience in Nepal”, “The introduction of innovative technologies and amenities by businesses in Nepal positively enhanced my overall satisfaction as a tourist”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.857$ ).

Customer satisfaction was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “Overall, I am satisfied with the services received during my visit to Nepal”, “I was satisfied with the responsiveness and professionalism of staff members in Nepal”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.857$ ).

The following section describes the independent variables used in this study along with the hypothesis formulation.

#### *Staff training*

Staff training is one way of ensuring that the people hired will work for the advantage of the company (Rosenstein, 2008). Staff training will help people to create positive attitude in the travel and tourism sector (Ayub 2011). According to Grönroos (2007), staff training is what customers perceive. Staff training consider everything that contributes to the process and the final outcome in making their assessments of the service that is performed by employee. Likewise, Zhang *et al.* (2020) found that service firms such as travel agencies have a difficulty foreseeing and understanding what aspects of the service that define high quality to the consumers and at what levels, so they are needed to be proper staff training to increase the quality. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between staff training and customer satisfaction.

#### *Infrastructure*

Infrastructure plays a vital role in the economic growth of many countries, contributing to the development of related services. Likewise, Boers and Cottrell (2007) found that the demands of tourists in the 21st century are very specialized and varied, so tourists are not simply satisfied with conventional travel experiences. Moreover, Mullen (1995) found that a country's infrastructure determines its potential attractiveness as a tourist destination. Furthermore, the study shows that tourism infrastructure has a positive impact both directly and indirectly on the quality of life of residents through sustainable tourism development (Javed *et al.*, 2020). Infrastructure in tourism development play positive role to attract tourist in the country (Prideaux, 2000). Infrastructure impact on tourism development relationship between tourism infrastructure and international visitor flows (Lim *et al.*, 2019). Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between infrastructure and customer satisfaction.

#### *Customer feedback mechanism*

The opportunities to learn about customers and customer behaviors are increasing, most software development companies experience the road mapping and requirements prioritization process of features as complex. Product management often finds it difficult to get timely and accurate feedback from customers (Olsson, 2014). Feedback loops are slow and there is a lack of mechanisms that allow for efficient collection and analysis of customer feedback (Olsson *et al.*, 2012). Confirmation of the correctness of product management decisions takes place only after the finalized product has been deployed to customers, and when there is little opportunity to adapt to changes (Sommerville and Kotonya, 1998). Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between customer feedback mechanism and customer satisfaction.

#### *Cultural sensitivity*

Cultural Sensitivity is the extent to which those who implement, support, and participate in ecotourism: Minimize impacts to the natural and cultural environments, foster intercultural awareness and respect, contribute to the protection of built and living cultural heritage, foster the informed participation and empowerment of local and Indigenous Peoples,

and respect the socio-cultural value systems of the host community (Tiwari, 2011). Similarly, cultural sensitivity is akin to the notion of vulnerability used widely in social-ecological systems and resilience research to depict communities, environments or social institutions and contexts threatened by various forces of change (Harrison & Price, 1996). Similarly, Handapangod *et al.* (2019) found that the idea of cultural sensitivity to the process of creating and using physical artefacts in contexts of heritage tourism. Becherel and Cooper (2002) illuminated the value of both social and cultural sensitivity in human resource management, while others emphasized the need to accommodate guests' interests, knowledge and language skills. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive relationship between cultural sensitivity and customer satisfaction.

#### *Service innovation*

Innovation is a critical source of competitive advantage for all service businesses, including hospitality and tourism businesses. Hospitality and tourism firms need to effectively manage service idea generation, new service development, and the creative delivery of services for innovation (Ostrom *et al.*, 2010). Service innovation has attracted considerable scholarly interest in both the hospitality and tourism management literature (Hjalager, 2010). Similarly, Larrea *et al.* (2021) found that reviews of innovation research between multiple disciplines including hospitality and tourism under three perspectives: economic, market, and organizational perspectives. Moreover, Larrea *et al.* (2021) found that insights into innovation research topics and areas should be explored since the study only analyzed innovation literature review studies published in non-HTM disciplines and fields. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a positive relationship between service innovation and customer satisfaction.

### **3. Results and discussion**

#### *Correlation analysis*

On analysis of data, correlation analysis has been undertaken first and for this purpose, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients along with mean and standard deviation has been computed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### **Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix**

This table presents Kendall's Tau coefficients between dependent and independent variables. The correlation coefficients are based on 119 observations. The dependent variable is CS (Customer satisfaction). The independent variables are ST (staff training), I (infrastructure), CSM (customer satisfaction mechanism), CSS (cultural sensitivity), and SI (service innovation).

Variables	Mean	S.D.	CS	ST	I	CFM	CSS	SI
CS	3.978	0.853	1					
ST	3.977	0.868	0.699**	1				
I	3.8623	0.558	0.534**	0.453**	1			
CFM	3.8623	0.951	0.660**	0.641**	0.640**	1		
CSS	3.9841	0.969	0.514**	0.505**	0.453**	0.682**	1	
SI	3.9536	0.909	0.570**	0.512**	0.499**	0.641**	0.565**	1

Notes: The asterisk signs (\*\*) and (\*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.



Table 2 shows the Kendall’s correlation coefficients of dependent and independent variables. The study indicates that staff training is positively correlated to customer satisfaction indicating that higher the staff training, higher will be the customer satisfaction. Likewise, infrastructure are positively correlated to the customer satisfaction indicating that higher the infrastructure, higher will be the customer satisfaction. Similarly, customer feedback mechanism is positively correlated to customer satisfaction indicating that better customer feedback mechanism lead to increase in customer satisfaction. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity is positively correlated to customer satisfaction. This implies supportive cultural sensitivity leads to increase in customer satisfaction. However, service innovation is positively correlated to the improvement customer satisfaction. It shows that proper service innovation leads to improve in tourism of Nepal.

*Regression analysis*

Having indicated the Kendall’s Tau correlation coefficients, the regression analysis has been carried out and the results are presented in Table 2. More specifically, it shows the regression results of staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity and service innovation of customer satisfaction

Table 2

**Estimated regression results of staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity and service innovation of customer satisfaction in Nepalese travel and tourism industry**

The results are based on 119 observations using linear regression model. The model is  $OP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ST + \beta_2 I + \beta_3 CFM + \beta_4 CSS + \beta_5 SI + \epsilon$ , where the dependent variable is CS (Customer satisfaction). The independent variables are ST (staff training), I (Infrastructure), CFM (customer feedback mechanism), CSS (Cultural sensitivity) and SI (Service innovation).

Model	Intercept	Regression coefficients of					Adj. R_bar²	SEE	F-value
		ST	I	CFM	CSS	SI			
1	0.221 (0.812)**	0.898 (13.603)**					0.607	0.500	185.040
2	0.856 (2.970)**		0.784 (10.634)**				0.485	0.572	113.080
3	0.238 (1.118)**			0.939 (17.336)**			0.716	0.425	300.524
4	0.479 (1.938)**				0.856 (13.932)**		0.619	0.492	194.112
5	0.626 (2.530)**					0.812 (13.327)**	0.597	0.506	177.609
6	0.137 (0.502)**	0.731 (6.368)**	0.198 (1.771)**				0.614	0.495	95.761
7	0.074 (0.317)**	0.241 (1.978)**	0.049 (0.484)**	0.778 (6.741)**			0.721	0.421	103.235
8	0.045 (0.192)*	0.218 (1.787)	0.112 (1.027)**	0.669 (5.020)**	0.198 (1.597)**		0.724	0.419	79.099
9	0.042 (0.183)	0.122 (0.967)	0.132 (1.236)*	0.715 (5.422)	0.028 (0.182)**	0.297 (2.435)**	0.735	0.410	67.177

Note:

- i. Figures in parenthesis are t-values.
- ii. The asterisk signs (\*\*) and (\*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.
- iii. Customer satisfaction is the dependent variable.

Table 2 shows that the beta coefficients for staff training are positive with the customer satisfaction. It indicates that staff training has positive impact on the customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Chiaburu & Takleab (2005). Likewise, the



beta coefficients for infrastructure are positive with the. It indicates that infrastructure have positive impact on the customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ibrar and Khan (2015). In addition, the beta coefficients for customer feedback mechanism are positive with the customer satisfaction. It indicates that customer feedback mechanism has a positive impact on the customer satisfaction. This result is consistent with the findings of Santoso *et al.* (2021). Further, the beta coefficients for cultural sensitivity are positively related with the customer satisfaction. It indicates that cultural sensitivity has a positive impact on the customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Zahra *et al.* (2020). Moreover, the beta coefficient for service innovation are positively related with the customer satisfaction. It indicates that service innovation has a positive impact on the customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of Chowdhury (2007).

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

Tourism refers to the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes for not more than one consecutive year. It encompasses a broad range of activities, services, and industries that work together to provide travel and accommodation to travellers, including transportation, hospitality, and entertainment. Tourism is a significant global industry, contributing to economic development, job creation, and cultural exchange, while also posing challenges related to environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. Tourism, a multifaceted global industry, encompasses the travel and stay of people in destinations outside their usual environment for a variety of purposes, including leisure, business, and health. It drives economic growth by creating jobs and generating income for local communities through expenditures on accommodation, dining, entertainment, and transportation.

This study attempts to measure service quality of travel and tourism in Nepal. The study is based on primary data of 119 respondents.

The major conclusion of this study is that higher the staff training, infrastructure, customer feedback mechanism, cultural sensitivity and service innovation higher would be customer satisfaction. The study concluded that the most influencing factor is customer feedback mechanism followed by cultural sensitivity that measure the service quality of Nepalese tourism.

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