

# Emotional Intelligence and Customer Orientation: *Unveiling the Power of Salespeople in Nepalese Hospitality Industry*

Aakash Lama<sup>1</sup> & Sujan Karki<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation (CO) among sales professionals in Nepal's hospitality and service sectors. Recognising the increasing relevance of emotional skills in customer-facing roles, the research aimed to quantify how EI influences customer-oriented behaviours. Data were collected from 120 sales professionals through a structured online questionnaire using two validated scales: the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) and the positively framed items of the Sales Orientation–Customer Orientation (SOCO) Scale. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed a strong, statistically significant relationship between EI and CO ( $\beta \approx 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining 54.5% of the variance. The model fit indicators confirmed the robustness and validity of the measurement tools. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence into recruitment, training, and professional development initiatives to enhance customer satisfaction and service quality. Future research may benefit from examining additional mediating variables and broader organisational settings to build a more comprehensive framework.

**Keywords:** customer orientation, emotional intelligence, hospitality industry, sales professionals

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing recognition of emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation (CO) in the service industry has prompted growing interest in understanding their influence on sales outcomes, particularly in customer-facing roles. Emotional intelligence, defined by Goleman (1995) as the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, has become an essential factor in improving interpersonal interactions in sales. Likewise, customer orientation, which involves focusing on customer needs and ensuring satisfaction, has long been regarded as a critical driver of sales success and customer relationship management

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. Lama is an academican and instructor of Food Production at NATHM with 10 years of experience. He is currently pursuing his MPhil at KUSOM. Email: [aakashlama@nathm.edu.np](mailto:aakashlama@nathm.edu.np)

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Karki is an instructor at NATHM with three years of teaching experience and nearly seven years of prior professional experience in the hospitality industry.

(Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Williams & Attaway, 1996). The relationship between EI and CO holds relevance in Nepal's service workforce, where sales professionals regularly face diverse customer needs and complex emotional situations. Despite the growing recognition of these constructs' importance, the specific mechanisms through which EI enhances customer-oriented behaviours have not been sufficiently examined, particularly within the Nepalese context.

Prior research has consistently demonstrated that customer orientation significantly contributes to improved sales outcomes, including higher customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Donavan et al., 2004; Narver & Slater, 1990). Emotional intelligence, particularly traits such as empathy and emotional regulation, is identified as a critical enabler of customer-oriented behaviours (Borg & Johnston, 2013; Ngugen, 2024). Emotional intelligence helps salespeople to better perceive and respond to customer emotions, adjust their approach to meet individual needs, and strengthen customer relationships. This ability has been shown to enhance overall service delivery and customer satisfaction. However, while studies have explored the relationship between EI and CO in other contexts, there is a lack of research specifically addressing these constructs within Nepal's unique cultural and economic environment.

While foundational works like those of Saxe and Weitz (1982) on customer orientation and Goleman (1995) on emotional intelligence have been instrumental in understanding their independent contributions to sales success, recent studies (e.g., Borg & Johnston, 2013; Ngunen, 2024) have focused on the individual impact of these constructs. However, research addressing the interaction between emotional intelligence and customer orientation, particularly how they work synergistically to drive sales performance, is limited. This gap is particularly pronounced in the context of Nepal's service industry, where cultural and economic factors may influence these relationships in unique ways. Given this, the current study seeks to quantify the relationship between EI and CO in Nepal's service workforce, specifically among sales professionals.

The primary objective of this research is to assess how emotional intelligence influences customer-oriented behaviours and to establish the impact of these behaviours on customer satisfaction and loyalty. To achieve this, the study employs well-established quantitative instruments such as the Sales Orientation-Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) and the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002) to identify and measure the interaction between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation (CO) within Nepal's service sector. Notably, this study focuses exclusively on the positively worded items of the SOCO scale. This approach is justified by prior research indicating that positively framed statements minimise respondent confusion and reduce measurement errors associated with reverse-coded items, thereby enhancing the reliability and clarity of the assessment of customer-oriented behaviours. By adopting this refined

measurement strategy, the study aims to fill existing research gaps and provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of emotional intelligence in fostering customer orientation, with significant implications for improving sales performance and customer service quality in Nepal's service industry.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Emotional Intelligence***

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was initially explored by [Thorndike \(1920\)](#), who identified it as part of social intelligence. [Salovey and Mayer \(1990\)](#) formally defined it as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 185). This definition laid the foundation for further development, which was notably expanded by [Goleman \(1995a, 1998\)](#). Goleman proposed that EI plays a crucial role in various areas of life, potentially even more than the traditional intelligence quotient (IQ). He conceptualised EI as encompassing five domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, all of which are essential in managing interpersonal relationships effectively, particularly in high-pressure situations like sales.

Recent empirical studies have reinforced the relevance of EI in modern workplaces. A comprehensive review by [Ahmad \(2025\)](#) emphasised that emotional intelligence significantly enhances employee engagement, organisational commitment, and work–life balance, particularly when supported by emotionally intelligent leadership. This underscores EI’s role not only as a personal asset but also as a strategic organisational resource. Additionally, a field study by [Elbirou \(2024\)](#) focusing on front-office employees in the Moroccan banking sector demonstrated that higher EI directly improved customer-oriented behavior, employees with strong emotional understanding and regulation were better able to build empathy, respond to customer emotions, and gain trust. A related intervention-based study in various industries confirmed that targeted training programs effectively develop emotional competencies, suggesting that EI can be nurtured and integrated into employee development and leadership initiatives. Together, these recent findings not only validate the foundational theories proposed by Salovey, Mayer, and Goleman but also extend their applicability to enhancing performance, customer engagement, and well-being in real-world organisational settings.

Building on these foundational perspectives, several theoretical models have further elaborated the structure and function of emotional intelligence. [Salovey and Mayer \(1990, 1997\)](#) proposed the Ability-Based Model, which conceptualises EI as a set of cognitive-emotional skills involving the perception, use, understanding, and regulation of emotions to facilitate thinking and behavior. This model laid the groundwork for developing performance-based assessments such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT).

Subsequent scholars, including [George \(2000\)](#) and [Macaleer and Shannon \(2002\)](#), contributed by highlighting the relationship between EI and leadership, emphasising how understanding and managing one's emotions contributes to effective organisational leadership. Furthermore, [Coleman \(2008\)](#) defined EI as the ability to distinguish and label emotions appropriately, while [Agarwal and Chaudhari \(2013\)](#) connected EI to success in life, well-being, and ethical decision-making. This cumulative body of research has demonstrated that EI is a complex construct involving emotional and interpersonal competencies that influence both behaviour and performance in professional settings.

Despite extensive research on EI, there is still some disagreement regarding its validity and practical usefulness. Some studies have identified correlations between EI and personal relationships or leadership success, while others have failed to find such relationships ([Miao et al., 2018](#)). Nevertheless, meta-analyses have suggested that EI accounts for a modest but significant portion of the variance in cognitive abilities and personality traits ([Ybarra et al., 2014](#)). In the business context, especially in sales, EI is crucial for recognising and responding to customers' emotions, thereby enhancing customer-oriented service ([Bar-On, 2006](#)). [Goleman \(1995a, 1998\)](#) posited that emotional competencies, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy, directly influence an individual's emotional intelligence and thus their ability to succeed in dynamic, customer-facing environments.

Research also suggests that salespeople, who often operate independently, need to develop intrinsic motivation, self-control, and discipline to achieve their objectives ([George, 2000](#)). Emotional intelligence helps salespeople manage challenges, such as customer rejection, conflict, and role ambiguity, which are common in sales. Empathy, a key component of EI, allows salespeople to understand their customers better, making them more effective in building relationships and achieving long-term sales goals ([Ingram, 1996](#); [Pilling & Eroglu, 1994](#)). This ability to engage in customer-oriented behaviours is strongly correlated with high levels of emotional intelligence, as individuals with greater emotional awareness are better able to control their emotions and maintain a calm, professional demeanour, even in challenging situations ([Crosby et al., 1990](#)).

### **Customer Orientation**

Customer orientation (CO) is a well-established concept in marketing, known for its positive effects on customer satisfaction and organisational performance ([Jaworski & Kohli, 1996](#); [Narver & Slater, 1990](#)). It refers to a business strategy that places customer needs at the centre of decision-making and aims to deliver superior value ([Rindfleisch & Moorman, 2003](#)). In customer-oriented organisations, employees are encouraged to use market intelligence to understand and meet customer expectations ([Koohli & Jaworski, 1990](#)), which can ultimately drive business success by fostering long-term customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Several studies have shown that customer orientation positively influences both employee performance and overall corporate performance (Deshpande et al., 1993; Slater & Narver, 2000). For example, research by Donavan et al. (2004) examined the relationship between employee behaviours and company performance, noting that customer-oriented employees tend to perform better in organisations that prioritise customer relationships. In contrast, measuring sales performance can be challenging in certain contexts, especially when sales goals extend beyond immediate sales volume to include long-term relationship management (Jaramillo et al., 2005).

The relationship between salespeople's customer orientation and their overall performance is well-documented. Salespeople who exhibit strong customer orientation are better positioned to build mutually beneficial relationships with clients, which leads to increased customer retention and satisfaction. However, some studies, such as the one conducted by Homburg et al. (2010), suggest that this relationship may not always be linear, especially in business-to-business (B2B) environments, where customer orientation may show an inverted U-shape, rather than a straightforward positive correlation.

### ***Positive Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Customer Orientation***

The relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation has been an important focus of academic inquiry. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognise, understand, and regulate one's emotions as well as the emotions of others. Customer orientation, on the other hand, involves behaviours that prioritise understanding and meeting customer needs to improve satisfaction and business performance. A growing body of research has highlighted the positive impact of emotional intelligence on customer-oriented behaviours, particularly in the service and sales industries.

Recent studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to customer orientation, particularly by enhancing interpersonal skills, empathy, and communication with clients. For instance, research by Pettijohn et al. (2010) in the context of pharmaceutical salespeople in the United Kingdom showed that emotional intelligence positively affects the salespeople's ability to adapt to customer needs, respond with empathy, and build strong, lasting relationships. Their findings suggest that EI allows salespeople to perceive and manage their emotions effectively, leading to better customer interactions and increased satisfaction.

In a similar vein, Kim and Lee (2016) investigated employees in a healthcare context in Korea, revealing that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with customer-oriented behaviours such as empathy, responsiveness, and overall customer care. Employees with higher EI were more likely to understand patient

concerns, regulate their emotional responses, and provide better service, directly enhancing patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, [Lim \(2017\)](#) extended this concept by studying hotel employees in Korea. The research showed that emotionally intelligent employees could build rapport with customers, leading to improved service quality and greater customer satisfaction. Emotional intelligence was found to be crucial in managing stress and maintaining positive interactions even during challenging customer service situations.

More recent studies have further solidified the link between emotional intelligence and customer orientation. [Pinto \(2017\)](#) conducted a study with 412 individuals in Portugal, showing that higher levels of emotional intelligence were associated with greater customer orientation in service industries. This research emphasised that EI contributes to employees' ability to effectively understand and meet customer needs, fostering long-term customer relationships.

[Aldosirya et al. \(2016\)](#) also examined the impact of emotional intelligence on sales productivity in Kuwait, particularly focusing on the automotive sales sector. The findings indicated that salespeople with higher emotional intelligence were more adept at understanding customer emotions and tailoring their sales strategies, accordingly, leading to improved sales performance and customer satisfaction.

Similarly, [Kadic-Maglajlic et al. \(2016\)](#) investigated emotional intelligence in B2B sales and found that emotional intelligence positively influenced sales performance by enhancing the ability to understand and respond to the emotional needs of clients. This research is particularly relevant for organisations seeking to improve sales in competitive business environments by leveraging the emotional intelligence of their sales teams.

Further studies, such as those by [Park and Dhandra \(2017\)](#), who analysed 1,006 employees from 127 companies, reinforced these findings. Their study demonstrated that employees with high emotional intelligence exhibited stronger customer orientation, characterised by an increased ability to handle customer issues, maintain composure, and develop strong customer relationships.

These studies collectively support the hypothesis that there is a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and customer orientation, particularly among professionals who engage in direct customer-facing roles. Emotional intelligence enhances employees' capacity to manage their emotions and understand the emotional states of their customers, which in turn improves their ability to respond appropriately, build rapport, and maintain long-term, trust-based relationships. Thus, organisations that prioritise emotional intelligence in their employees' development can significantly enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall business performance.

Thus, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a strong and positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the customer orientation of salespeople.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research aimed to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation among sales professionals by utilising a structured electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire combined two validated scales alongside demographic items and was distributed online for self-completion. Data normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and appropriate correlation and hypothesis testing procedures were applied based on the results. The model estimation was carried out using the maximum likelihood method based on the original scale items. A two-stage modelling approach was adopted, starting with the adjustment of the measurement model, followed by the structural model. To evaluate model fit, indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were used, with values above 0.90 considered indicative of good fit, as referenced by [Marôco \(2014\)](#). Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was considered, with a 90% confidence interval; an RMSEA below 0.05 indicated excellent fit, while values below 0.10 suggested a reasonable fit. Modification indices greater than 11 ( $p < 0.001$ ) were analysed to detect potential local adjustment issues, and only theoretically justifiable modifications were made by correlating error terms to enhance the model's fit. All parameter estimates were reported in their standardised form.

The measure introduced by [Wong and Law \(2002\)](#) was employed to assess emotional intelligence, using a 16-item scale known as the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). This instrument evaluates four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The coefficient alpha values for the WLEIS subscales typically range from 0.83 to 0.90, indicating high internal consistency ([Rodrigues et al., 2011](#)). Sample items include statements such as "I have a good understanding of my own emotions" and "I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others."

To measure customer orientation, the positively stated items from the Sales Orientation–Customer Orientation (SOCO) Scale developed by [Saxe and Weitz \(1982\)](#) were utilised. The scale included 13 positively worded items aimed at capturing the extent to which salespeople engage in customer-oriented behaviours. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This approach focused exclusively on affirmatively framed items to avoid confusion associated with reverse-coded statements. The



scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with coefficient alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.89 (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Sample items include: “I try to help customers achieve their goals,” “I offer the product that best suits the customer’s needs,” and “I try to give customers an accurate expectation of what the product will do for them.”

The sample comprised sales professionals employed across diverse service sectors in Nepal, who voluntarily participated in the study by completing a self-administered online questionnaire. The study employed convenience sampling, selecting participants based on their accessibility through professional social media groups. This method was suitable given the wide geographic distribution of the target population and the ease of reaching actively engaged sales professionals in customer-facing roles across Nepal’s service sectors. The survey was circulated through social media platforms, specifically targeting professional groups that included individuals engaged in direct sales interactions with customers. These participants represented a range of industries, including restaurants, recreation businesses, hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators, all of which are key components of Nepal’s growing service sector. The target population for this study was defined as sales professionals working in customer-facing roles within service-based industries. These individuals frequently engage in emotional labor and require strong interpersonal skills, making them especially relevant for examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation. To reduce response bias and enhance data reliability, the questionnaire featured randomised ordering of items. The sampling method used in this study was convenience sampling, where sales professionals from various service sectors in Nepal were selected based on accessibility through social media platforms. This approach was justified as it allowed the researchers to efficiently target individuals with direct customer interaction, which is central to the research objectives. Although it limits generalisability, the sample’s relevance to the study’s focus on emotional intelligence and customer orientation makes this method appropriate.

A total of 120 respondents were included in the study sample. Although the sample size may appear modest, it is considered adequate for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is known for its robustness with smaller samples (Hair et al., 2019). Moreover, the participants were carefully selected from relevant service sectors and met specific criteria as sales professionals in customer-facing roles. This targeted approach ensured data relevance and quality, which strengthens the validity of the findings despite the limited sample size. Future studies may expand on this by using larger and more diverse samples to enhance generalisability. The sample was evenly split by gender (72 male, 48 female). Age was skewed toward younger participants: about 58% were under 30 years old, with the remainder spread across older age brackets. The largest industry represented was hospitality: 38% worked in hotels, 23% in restaurants, and 16% in airlines; smaller proportions were in travel agencies (12%), catering (8%), or tour operations (3%). In terms of education,



75% held at least a bachelor's degree (with 44% bachelor's, 30% master's or above), and 25% had a diploma or high-school education. Most respondents were early-career professionals: 61% had under five years of experience, while 39% had five or more years. In summary, the sample was young, well-educated, and primarily hotel-industry salespeople.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis commenced with a descriptive examination of the sample characteristics to provide foundational context for interpreting the results. Understanding the distribution of respondents in terms of gender, age, and economic sector was essential to assess the diversity and representativeness of the participants within the service industry. This step also aids in establishing the relevance of the sample to the research objectives, which focus on the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation. Following the descriptive analysis, further statistical procedures were conducted to evaluate construct reliability and validity, and to test the proposed structural model. Table 1 presents the demographic and professional profile of the respondents.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation (CO) among sales professionals in the hospitality and service sectors. A total of 120 valid responses were collected using a structured questionnaire that incorporated items from the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) and the Sales Orientation–Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale. Based on the methodological approach of the referenced article, only the positively

Table 1  
Sampling Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	72	60
	Female	48	40
Age Groups	Less than 30 yrs	70	58.3
	31 to 37 yrs	27	22.5
	38 to 42 yrs	3	2.5
	More than 42	20	16.7
Economic Sub-sectors	Restaurants	28	23.33
	Hotels	46	38.33
	Travel Agencies	14	11.66
	Tour Operators	4	3.33
	Airlines	19	15.83
	Catering	9	7.5

*Note.* From the author's survey, 2025

Table 2  
Reliability of Scales (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)	4	0.75
Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)	4	0.82
Use of Emotion (UOE)	4	0.80
Regulation of Emotion (ROE)	4	0.83
Customer Orientation (CO)	13 (positive items)	0.87

*Note.* From the author's survey, 2025

Table 3  
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Model Fit Indices)

Fit Index	Observed Value	Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-Square/df ( $\chi^2/df$ )	$\approx 2.00$	$< 3.00$	Acceptable
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	$\approx 0.93$	$> 0.90$	Good fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	$\approx 0.91$	$> 0.90$	Good fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	$\approx 0.06$	$< 0.08$	Acceptable
Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	$\approx 0.05$	$< 0.08$	Acceptable

*Note.* From the author's survey, 2025

phrased SOCO items were used to measure customer orientation to ensure clarity and consistency in construct measurement.

Following the demographic analysis, an assessment of internal consistency was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the measurement instruments used in the study. This step is essential to verify that the items within each construct consistently represent the underlying theoretical dimensions of emotional intelligence and customer orientation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each subscale of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) and the positively worded items from the Sales Orientation–Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale. Establishing reliability at this stage provides a necessary basis for subsequent analyses, including confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The reliability results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows all multi-item scales with acceptable internal consistency. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was computed for each WLEIS subscale and the Customer Orientation (CO) scale: Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA)  $\alpha = 0.752$ , Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA)  $\alpha = 0.82$ , Use of Emotion (UOE)  $\alpha = 0.80$ , Regulation of Emotion (ROE)  $\alpha = 0.833$ , and CO  $\alpha = 0.87$ . These results suggest reliable measurement of the constructs. Mean scores indicated generally high agreement with items: average

EI and CO scores were above the midpoint, reflecting positive self-ratings of emotional abilities and customer-oriented behaviours (Table references omitted). These reliability findings align with prior work confirming the Wong-Law EI scale and Saxe-Weitz SOCO scale in sales samples.

Subsequent to confirming internal consistency, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model's validity and the adequacy of the underlying factor structure. This step is critical for verifying whether the observed variables appropriately represent their respective latent constructs, emotional intelligence and customer orientation. The CFA results provide evidence on model fit through multiple indices, ensuring that the hypothesised relationships between observed items and factors are statistically supported. Table 3 summarises the fit indices obtained, which indicate an acceptable to good fit between the model and the observed data, thereby confirming the suitability of the measurement framework for further structural analysis.

Table 3 presents the results of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) performed on the 29 selected items, which include 16 items measuring Emotional Intelligence (EI) and 13 positively worded items assessing Customer Orientation (CO). All items loaded significantly on their intended factors (standardised loadings were substantial, generally  $> 0.50$ ). The CFA fit indices were within acceptable ranges:  $\chi^2/df$  was near 2.0, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was approximately 0.93, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) about .91, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) around 0.06 (90% CI  $\approx 0.05$ – $0.08$ ), and the Standardised Root Mean Residual (SRMR) about .05. These values meet conventional criteria (e.g. CFI/TLI  $> 0.90$  and RMSEA/SRMR  $< 0.08$ ), indicating that the measurement model fits the data well. In sum, the hypothesised factor structure was confirmed.

Following the validation of the measurement model, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation. This analysis allows for the examination of the direct effect of emotional intelligence on customer orientation while accounting for measurement error. The standardised path coefficients and explained variance provide insight into the strength and significance of the relationship within the proposed model. Table 4 summarises the path analysis results, indicating a robust and statistically significant positive association between emotional intelligence and customer orientation.

Table 4 presents the structural equation model (SEM) in which overall Emotional Intelligence is specified as a predictor of Customer Orientation. The standardised path from EI to CO was strongly positive ( $\beta \approx 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that higher overall emotional intelligence scores were associated with higher customer orientation. The model explained approximately 54.5% of the variance in customer orientation. In other words, for each one standard-deviation increase in EI, CO

Table 4  
Structural Model Summary (Path Analysis)

Path	Standardised Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Interpretation
Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ CO	0.74	< 0.001	Strong positive relationship: Hypothesis supported

*Note. From the author's survey, 2025*

increased by roughly 0.74 standard deviations. Hypothesis 1 (that EI positively predicts CO) was thus supported. These findings mirror the positive EI–CO link reported by Santos et al. (2020), although the paper's finding shows the effect ( $\beta \approx 0.742$ ,  $R^2 \approx 0.551$ ) was even larger than their reported  $\beta = 0.35$  (with 12% variance explained). The stronger effect here may reflect sample or contextual differences, but qualitatively, both studies agree that EI significantly enhances salespeople's customer orientation.

The results of this study do not allow for the rejection of Hypothesis 1: there is a strong and positive correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and customer orientation (CO) among salespeople. The observed statistical relationships between the constructs and their respective latent dimensions, along with a strong model fit during the measurement phase of structural equation modelling (SEM), confirm the internal reliability and external validity of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002) and the Saxe and Weitz SOCO scale (1982). The significant and positive relationship observed between total emotional intelligence and customer orientation supports the theoretical perspectives that informed this research. The positive EI–CO relationship is consistent with theoretical assumptions: salespeople with greater emotional intelligence are more adept at recognising, understanding, and managing their own emotions and those of others, thereby enabling them to better address customer needs and build strong interpersonal relationships. Prior research suggests that high-EI individuals display greater resilience and self-regulation in stressful sales environments, which facilitates more customer-focused behaviours. The strong association found in this study aligns with this view and is further supported by meta-analytic evidence showing that salesperson traits such as EI, communication skills, and intrinsic motivation significantly contribute to customer orientation and performance.

Moreover, this positive relationship is reinforced by the acceptable fit indices of the measurement model, indicating that the underlying structures of both EI and CO were well captured by the data. The standardised regression coefficient from emotional intelligence to customer orientation ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) illustrates the practical significance of emotional competencies in predicting ethical, long-term customer engagement strategies. These results are in line with earlier findings by Pinto (2017) and Park and Dhandra (2018), both of whom found that emotionally

intelligent individuals tend to exhibit customer-oriented behaviours more frequently and effectively. The notably strong relationship observed between emotional intelligence and customer orientation in this study may be influenced by the unique cultural and economic dynamics of Nepal's service sector, where interpersonal sensitivity and emotional attunement are especially valued. This suggests that emotional intelligence might exert a greater influence in contexts that emphasise relational interactions, highlighting the importance of considering cultural specificity when interpreting such findings.

Further, the reliability and validity analyses conducted in this study corroborate the robustness of the adapted WLEIS and SOCO scales in this context. The internal consistency observed is comparable to that reported by [Santos et al. \(2020\)](#), while the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicates good construct validity under accepted model fit criteria.

In contrast, while the reliability and validity of the adapted measurement scales are encouraging, the exclusive use of self-reported data raises concerns about potential bias. Social desirability and cultural tendencies toward harmonious responses may inflate reported emotional intelligence and customer orientation levels. Future studies should therefore incorporate behavioral measures or multi-source feedback to validate and enrich understanding of these constructs in practice. The structural model demonstrates a significant effect of emotional intelligence on customer orientation.

In addition to theoretical implications, these findings have important practical significance. They suggest that organisations should consider incorporating emotional intelligence assessments into their recruitment, training, and development programs. Enhancing emotional competence among sales professionals can foster more customer-centric approaches, ultimately improving customer satisfaction and sales performance. These insights are also supported by research from [Aldosiry et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Kadic-Magljalic et al. \(2016\)](#), who emphasise the mediating or complementary role of emotionally intelligent, customer-oriented behaviours in driving sales effectiveness. The structural model demonstrates a significant effect of emotional intelligence on customer orientation. In addition to theoretical implications, these findings have important practical significance. They suggest that organisations should consider incorporating emotional intelligence assessments into their recruitment, training, and development programs. Enhancing emotional competence among sales professionals can foster more customer-centric approaches, ultimately improving customer satisfaction and sales performance. These insights align with recent findings from [Lee and Kim \(2023\)](#) and [Al-Harthi et al. \(2020\)](#), who emphasise the mediating role of emotional intelligence in enhancing customer engagement and driving sales effectiveness across diverse cultural contexts. Overall, the results provide compelling evidence that emotional intelligence is a key antecedent of customer orientation. The study highlights

the critical role of emotional competencies in successful sales interactions and reinforces the strategic value of emotional intelligence development for building a more engaged and effective sales force.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study investigated the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Customer Orientation (CO) among sales professionals in the hospitality and service sectors. The results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesis that higher levels of emotional intelligence are significantly associated with greater customer orientation. Specifically, emotional intelligence was found to explain approximately 54.5% of the variance in customer orientation, with a standardised regression coefficient ( $\beta \approx 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a robust and practically meaningful effect.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments, with all model-fit indices within acceptable thresholds. These results validate the internal consistency and construct validity of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) and the positively worded items from the Saxe and Weitz SOCO scale. The findings not only align with but exceed the strength of earlier studies, such as [Santos et al. \(2020\)](#), further reinforcing the theoretical assumption that emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in shaping salespeople's customer-oriented behaviour.

While the present study establishes a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation, it is important to consider how cultural and economic contexts unique to Nepal may have shaped these findings. Nepal's collectivist cultural orientation often emphasises interpersonal harmony, emotional restraint, and respect for social hierarchy, factors that may amplify the role of emotional intelligence in shaping effective customer service behaviours. In such a context, emotionally intelligent sales professionals may be better equipped to navigate nuanced social expectations, respond empathetically to diverse customer needs, and maintain positive relational dynamics, all of which are critical in customer-oriented roles. Additionally, economic constraints and job insecurity are common in Nepal's developing service industry may create heightened stress for sales personnel, thereby increasing the relevance of emotional regulation and resilience, core aspects of emotional intelligence, in ensuring consistent, high-quality service delivery. These contextual factors may partly explain the high variance (54.5%) explained by EI in this study, suggesting that emotional intelligence could be even more essential in resource-constrained and socially complex work environments. Future research should therefore incorporate cross-cultural comparative analysis or context-specific moderation variables to better understand how such factors influence the EI–CO relationship in different socio-economic and cultural settings.



The results point to the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence into sales training and development programmes, especially within hospitality and service industries where customer orientation is critical. Enhancing emotional skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy can support professionals in building stronger customer relationships and managing job-related stress more effectively. Organisations may benefit from using emotional intelligence as a criterion in recruitment and employee development, aligning workforce capabilities with customer-centric goals. Future research could explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation in diverse cultural or organisational contexts, using longitudinal designs to assess changes over time. Investigating additional variables such as job satisfaction, leadership influence, or communication style could deepen understanding of the mechanisms at play. Employing behavioural or performance-based indicators alongside self-report measures may also offer a more comprehensive perspective on how emotional competencies influence customer-focused behaviour and sales outcomes.

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