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# **Understanding Tourist Brand Loyalty: Key Antecedents in Annapurna Region's Resorts in Nepal**

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#### **Abstract**

**Background:** Brand loyalty in tourism sector is frequently talked but it does not appear to have been researched in an authentic manner. This study tries to uncover the facts in the context of perceived facilities, service quality and price value in Annapurna Region's Resorts in Nepal. This present article attempts to measure the brand loyalty of foreign tourist in the resorts located at the Annapurna Region.

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**Methods:** Descriptive and causal research design was used as it is quantitative in nature. Structured questionnaires were administered in the survey. Two hundred and fifty tourists who stayed in the Annapurna Region's Resorts were approached and data were obtained. Structure equation modelling technique was used to examine the major factors affecting brand loyalty in the resorts located at the Annapurna Region.

**Results:** This research confirmed perceived facilities and service quality were the most important factors on brand loyalty. Price value has no significant effect on brand loyalty for tourists located in Annapurna Region's Resorts.

**Conclusion:** Marketing managers should concentrate on service quality provided in the resorts at Annapurna Region and tries to know how it is perceived by tourists.

Keywords: Brand loyalty, Annapurna Region, SEM, Nepal

#### Introduction

When customer becomes connected to the brand it is called brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Cardoso et al., 2022). It is the tendency to show the intention of the customer to buy the brand as their earlier primary choice (Yoo & Donthun, 2001; Wang et al., 2023). It is the sincere commitment to repurchase the likely products/brands frequently in the future whether any situational influence and marketing efforts may play the role to switch the brands (Oliver, 1999; Irshad et al., 2024). Dekimpe and others (1997) depict it is the observable behaviour and can be measured easily.

To sustain and survive in the markets, companies have to create and maintain loyal customers for their brand (Mellens et al., 1996; Quayson et al., 2024). Keiningham et al. (2008) argue emotional aspects of brand loyalty programs help to enhance the efficiency of companies brand marketing programs. Increasing five percent in customer retentions activities simultaneously lead to increase in 25 to 125 percent increase in profits (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). When marketing and selling costs are decreased, charging more price, positive word of mouth and high profit tends to increase more profit to the company (McMullan & Gilmore, 2003; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Rowley, 2005). It is also said that loyal consumers have shown least interest to evaluate among alternative brands leads to reduce the chance of brand switching (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004; Damaschi et al., 2025). Bowen and Shoemaker (2003) found when customers became loyal to hotel they used to purchase more hotel services such as hotel meal and laundry services. So, that, brand loyalty is major tools to build up a sustainable competitive advantage for a company (Dick & Basu, 1994; Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Han et al., 2008; Farida & Setiawan, 2022).

Suhartanto (2011) confirmed service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty are the antecedents of brand loyalty for Indonesian hotel industry. According to the Nepal Tourism Board (n.d.), the Annapurna Region is a premier trekking destination in Nepal, renowned for its breathtaking diversity. It features world-class trails like the Annapurna Circuit, rich cultural encounters with local communities, and stunning views of Himalayan giants, including Annapurna I and Dhaulagiri (Nepal Tourism Board, n.d.).

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According to Shrestha (2016), resorts provide wide variety of itineraries like Royal Nepal Spectacular (13 nights), Annapurna Base Camp Trek (ABC trekking), Scared mountain Trek (9 nights), Scared Mountain Trek and River Float (11 nights), Everest Trekking (12 days), Poon Hill Trekking (11 nights) and Nepal Family Itinerary (8 nights).

Trekking Himalayas is famous for tourists to visit Nepal. Trekking Himalayas is somehow difficult task and need to walk in a relaxed speed. The trails are in zigzag and natural type but good in condition. By walking tourists can enjoy lots of time by felling like near to nature and taking photos and overwhelming the Himalayan surroundings to see the rural Nepal. All the lodges offer same quality service to every tourist in order to keep similarity of all the lodges but one of Seti River Camp provides rafting excursion and tourists enjoy in rural and peaceful lodgings to the remote camp to the river of green forest at Pokhara (Shrestha, 2016).

Empirical investigation has been lacking in research done of foreign tourists came to trek at Annapurna Region probably. So, this study contributes specially to examine the factors affecting brand loyalty of foreign tourists in the resorts located at Annapurna Region. The study has addressed the following questions:

What are the antecedent factors of tourist brand loyalty in the Annapurna Region's resorts? Major objective of this study was to measure the factors affecting touring brand loyalty in the Annapurna region's resorts.

Perceived facilities are the consumer's subjective evaluation of the availability, presence, and quality of supportive conditions (<u>Riyadi& Setyanto, 2025</u>). It includes received support and previous experience of the service (Lee et al., 2014). It also really includes perceived service delivery support (<u>Hosseinnejad et al., 2022</u>). Perceived facilities and perceived service quality significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (<u>Riyadi& Setyanto, 2025</u>).

Service quality is the consumer's evaluation about the overall superiority of features of a product or a service (Zeithaml, 1988). It can manipulate consumer purchase (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). It's a common consensus that service quality matters on unique characteristics of the services like, intangibility, inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity of services (Rust & Oliver, 1994). Some researchers argue service quality consists of two types of quality: functional and technical quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Dabholkar et al., 1996). Technical quality is what customer receives at service delivery process (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Groonroos, 1984) and functional quality is the result of interaction between service provider and service customer at service encounter (Gronroos, 1984; Ladhari, 2008; Lau et al., 2005). SERVQUAL is very famous model depicted by Zeithaml et al. (1996) provides tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are the basic dimensions of service quality. Cronin et al. (2000) proposed a practical model named SERVPERF to measure actual service quality and the successor of SERVQUAL model. It is the service quality gap based on customer expectations about services what it would be and customer get the services what it is.

Price value, often called perceived financial value, is the consumer's subjective judgment of the relationship between the price paid and the benefits received (Garcia-Salirrosas, 2024). This

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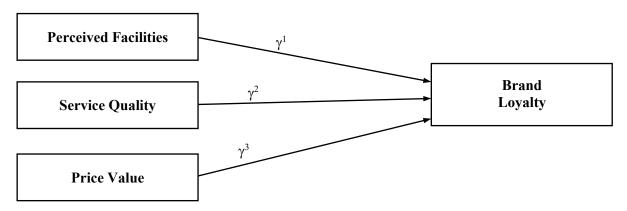
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perception assesses whether the product's worth justifies the money and other costs (time, effort) invested (<u>Kiddon, 2025</u>). It is defined where the function of the price paid relates to the offering's perceived worth (<u>Kotler & Keller, 2016</u>).

Brand loyalty is the strong intention to buy something in the future (Son, 2010). A brand loyal customer buys a product regularly and displays a positive attitude towards the product (Aawan & Rehman, 2014; Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2011; Oliver, 1999). No matter how good the competitor's product is, the customer remains loyal to the product he likes, due to which the company gets the opportunity to profit and expand the business (Aawan & Rehman, 2014; Holt, 2004).

Figure 1
Research Framework



Source: Adapted from Suhartanto (2011)

These hypotheses were derived from this model are as follows:

 $\gamma^1$ : Perceived facilities has significant impact on brand loyalty (BL).

 $\gamma^2$ : Service quality has significant impact on BL.

 $\gamma^3$ : Price value has significant impact on BL.

#### **Research Methods**

This study is descriptive and causal in nature. The research is descriptive because all the related constructs were thoroughly explained and reviewed. The constructs are based on literature review. For causal in nature, cause and effect relations has been tested to draw valid conclusion. Population of the study is the tourists who had stayed at resorts located in Annapurna Region. The sample size of study was 250 visitors approached during study (Kline, 1998). The questionnaires were designed on the basis of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling method was used (Mahat et al., 2024). The study is cross sectional in nature. Research instruments was based on Liker scale showing five options from "Strongly Disagree" = "1" to "Strongly Agree" = "5". Research questions were adapted in consistent with Suhartanto (2011). Perceived facilities, service quality, price and brand loyalty has equally 5 items in each construct (Suhartanto, 2011).

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Structured questionnaires were distributed to tourists who stayed at the resorts located at different locations of Annapurna Region. First the hotel guest were approached and requested to fill the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed them and they filled the questionnaire at their expense. It was considered to respect their comfortness and privacy. Data were collected within one month period.

Structure Equation Modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis especially to test the hypothesized model of more exogenous and endogenous variables. SEM has two parts, first is Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that was used refine and extract the variables with no cross loadings. For the second part, the researcher has run Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the model fit and validity of the measurement model. SPSS 24 and AMOS 24 software were used for data analysis purpose.

Male respondents were representing 65 percent and female respondents were of 35 percent. Majority of the respondents were of age between 20-35 yrs representing 75 percent. For age profile, Age over 55 years were representing larger portion of 31 percent. In terms of education, 63 percent were of bachelor degree. As for occupation, professionals, retired and government officials were representing 39 percent, 24 percent and 18 percent. In terms of nationality, the majority of respondents were British showing 36 percent followed by Americans having 25 percent and Singaporean having 23 percent.

#### Results

The results present the outcome of the survey in a scientific manner.

#### **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Hair et al. (1998) argued that Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used to grouped the indicator variables into one construct. In this study, related factors were refined and grouped that would affect brand loyalty. For running confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), EFA is the first step to group the factors.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a Chi-square value of 413.134, which was statistically significant (p = 0.000 < 0.05), indicating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and therefore suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.793, which falls within the acceptable range, suggesting that the dataset had sufficient common variance for conducting factor analysis. This confirmed that sample number were adequate for further analysis. Five factors were drawn that have shown total effect 63.83 of variance. Scale items more than 0.5 were grouped into the related construct. Seven scale items were dropped out bearing low factor loadings below 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010).

Factor 1 is said to be perceived facilities. Factor 2 is called service quality. Factor 3 is called price value. Factor 4 is named as brand loyalty.

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**Table 1:** Rotated Component Matrix

Scale Items	Component			
	Perceived	Service	Price	Brand
	Facilities	Quality	Value	Loyalty
PF4	0.734			
PF2	0.752			
PF1	0.684			
PF3	0.672			
SQ3		0.828		
SQ1		0.782		
SQ4		0.663		
PV3			0.824	
PV2			0.773	
PV4			0.771	
BL1				0.795
BL2				0.786
BL5				0.745

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

#### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was utilized to assess the measurement model, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) With regard to the statistical outputs, the model presented an acceptable adjustment, considering the following indices: CMIN/DF = 2.23, GFI = 0.951, CFI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.032 and RMR = 0.031, since they are within the limits considered acceptable according to previous studies of a methodological nature (Byrne, 2001; Hair et al., 1998; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). These results validated the retention of the model for further investigation.

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Convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated to establish the soundness of the measurement model. The discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the AVE with the other variance measures. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), 0.50 is a substantial threshold for the adequacy of AVE. In addition, the AVE needs to also be greater than the MSV and the ASV, proving that the constructs are truly distinct from each other. Conversely, CR was used to test convergent validity. CR > 0.70, and CR must also be greater than each corresponding AVE value (CR > AVE) Table 2 summarises these indicators, which indicated sufficient evidence of construct validity and reliability.

Table 2: Validity of the Model

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	Brand	Perceived	Service	Price
					Loyalty	<b>Facilities</b>	Quality	Value
Brand Loyalty	0.887	0.535	0.495	0.146	0.735			
<b>Perceived Facilities</b>	0.864	0.523	0.498	0.179	0.686	0.735		
Service Quality	0.811	0.552	0.486	0.145	0.177	0.496	0.722	
Price Value	0.866	0.571	0.284	0.077	0.233	0.489	0.542	0.713

As displayed in Table 2, all AVE value of construct is more than the threshold point of 0.50, which shows the variable explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Moreover, the AVE values exceed MSV and ASV for each of the examined constructs, further validating the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Accordingly, convergent validity was confirmed because the CR was found to be higher than 0.70 and greater than their AVE too. Overall, for all the above reasons, it contextually suggests that the measurement model is viable enough to meet the threshold of validity standards to carry on with the future analysis.

#### **Structural Equation Modeling**

The proposed framework hypothesized the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables and therefore, the SEM can effectively analyze those relationships. After confirming the measurement model through CFA, the structural model was estimated. The structural model is shown in Table 3 where hypotheses were tested.

According to the results, the squared multiple correlation of brand loyalty was 0.92 (92%). This means that the model accounted for 92 percent of the variance in brand loyalty. In other words, brand loyalty had a large explanatory power, confirming the robustness of the structural relationships that influenced loyalty in the model.

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#### **Hypotheses Testing**

**Table 3:** Hypotheses Testing (Structural Model)

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Hypothesis	From	То	Standardized Coefficients	S.E.	t-value	Remarks
$\gamma^1$	Perceived	Brand	.684	.261	2.622	Accepted
	Facilities	Loyalty				
$\gamma^2$	Service Quality	Brand	.422	.256	2.648	Accepted
		Loyalty				
$\gamma^3$	Price Value	Brand	.391	.250	1.562	Not
		Loyalty				Accepted

Table 3 shows regression coefficients of perceived facilities and service quality on brand loyalty were significant. So  $\gamma^1$  and  $\gamma^2$  were supported. Regression coefficient of price value on brand loyalty was not significant. So,  $\gamma^3$  was not supported. This means customers viewed price value differently for building brand loyalty at the resorts located in the Annapurna. It can be argued that perceived facilities and service quality were influential factor for determining brand loyalty at the resorts located in Annapurna Region.

#### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that perceived facilities and service quality significantly contribute to brand lovalty in resorts located in the Annapurna region, whereas price value does not play a significant role. The structural equation model demonstrated strong explanatory power for brand loyalty (93%). This outcome suggests that tourists in this region place greater emphasis on the quality of services and available facilities rather than on price considerations when forming brand loyalty. These findings align with previous research in some aspects but diverge in others. For example, Wang and Li (2023) conducted a meta-analysis and identified satisfaction, experience quality, perceived value, and perceived quality as the strongest antecedents of tourist loyalty. While service quality resonates with these results, the insignificance of price value in the Annapurna Region's context contrasts with the broader literature, where perceived value often emerges as an important determinant. Similarly, Matolo et al. (2021) found that service quality, perceived value, and destination image were key drivers of destination loyalty in Serengeti National Park, further underscoring the consistent role of service quality while highlighting contextual differences in the role of perceived value. Othman and Osman (2024) also reported that perceived value, image, and safety positively influenced satisfaction, which then drove loyalty in Malaysia's homestay sector, again differing from the current study's non-significant result for price value. Furthermore, So et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of customer engagement in enhancing loyalty to tourism brands, suggesting that additional constructs beyond facilities and service quality could further enrich loyalty models. Collectively, while the present study reinforces the critical role of service quality and facilities, it challenges the universality of price value as an antecedent of loyalty and suggests

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the need for future research to consider mediators such as satisfaction, trust, and engagement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourist brand loyalty in Nepal's resort sector.

#### Conclusion

The findings of the study showed that perceived facilities and service quality were the major factors for brand loyalty at the resorts located in Annapurna Region. The results indicate service quality stand for the facilities of the resorts located in Annapurna Region, are modern and staff performance is right at the time. Also, the service quality of the resorts located in Annapurna Region has emerged the best predicator of loyalty customer. Measuring customer loyalty is an important task of marketing manager for sustainability in the hospitality industry. If organization is unable to understand the value of customer satisfaction it is difficult to retain customers. The challenge is not only to attract customer but as well as satisfying their needs by providing excellent services. Higher prices may negatively affect the brand loyalty. Perceived facilities should be given and value should be generated from it. Marketing manager should keep in mind when promoting the resort in the hospitality sector.

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Data Availability Statement: Authors can provide data.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare there is no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions: The authors conducted all research activities i.e., concept, data collecting,

drafting and final review of manuscript.

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