

Service quality and customer satisfaction in resorts: Antecedents of gap from the perspective of SERVQUAL gap model.

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Abstract— This study measured the existing level of service quality and customer satisfaction in Nepali resorts and identified the antecedents of the service-quality gap using the SERVQUAL Gap Model. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed; data were collected in 2023 through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. Resorts' employees rated the service quality delivered, while customers who had stayed at least one night rated their expectations and perceived performance. Respondents were drawn from the General, Deluxe, and Luxury resort categories in Bagmati Province of Nepal; after data screening and outlier removal, 303 employees and 303 customers (N = 606) were included in the analysis. A six-component instrument (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and expectation) contextualized through a three-stage Modified Delphi Technique and rated on a five-point Likert scale was used; satisfaction was quantified and measured as the perception minus expectation (P – E) gap. Employees rated overall service quality mean score was high (M = 4.54, SD = 0.29), whereas the customer perception minus expectation gap was negative on every dimension, giving an average mean of satisfaction score (–0.81) with SD = 1.03 divergence. A negative score indicates that perceived performance fell below the customer expectation; that is, dissatisfaction—with the widest shortfall in tangibility (–0.87) and the narrowest in responsiveness (–0.78). None of the six contextualized components met or exceeded customer expectations, indicating persistent gaps rooted mainly in the management-perception gap (Gap-1). Continuous, antecedent-focused improvement is required, and future research may extend the model to the cultural and selfless human-value dimension of services.

Keywords: antecedents of gap, customer satisfaction, gap model, resorts, service quality, SERVQUAL.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Nepal, aspects of service quality and customer satisfaction are getting better. Different graduates from various professional institutions are involved as employees. However, due to lack of adequate study, knowledge and skills in employees, Nepali resorts are not able to claim the legacy on service quality and customer's satisfaction [1]. Lack of resources, less developed infrastructure, ambiguity on policy as well as different barriers on operational activity are considered as normal in Nepali hospitality whereas, there are very few rigorous studies on service quality and customer satisfaction is available. Adhikari argued that only a small number of master's students of Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM) have conducted research in this area, however these studies are also focus on star-rated hotels, restaurants, and airline services [2].

Similar amenities offered by hotels and resorts include food and drink, housekeeping, laundry, and other tangible and intangible related services. But some of the specific experience-based services such as jungle activities, connection to the nature, wildlife and different species activities, cultural activities, religious activities, well-being activities, sports and many more are related to resorts in Nepal [3]. For conducting those specific activities, knowledge on the gift of nature and availability of different wildlife and species is essential [4]. Thus, to address such requirements, Nepali resorts are generally established far from the city or top of the hill side, either bank of the river or near the national park or, in general, geographically appropriate area [2]. As a result of this exclusion, Nepali resorts are able to provide experience-based intangible service quality through different encounters above and beyond the imagination that contribute higher satisfaction to the customers.

Empowered employees and well knowledge on related fields is required for each operating staff to provide service quality. Naturalists, wildlife specialists, tour guides, wellbeing and sports teachers required professional courses and special training to approach those specific activities. In Nepal those requirements regarding the Nepali resorts are not clearly mentioned. Due to lack of specific education and training in this specific area of service quality and customer satisfaction, quality of those services is becoming less emphasized, but it is an essential and crucial part of the guest experiences of the resorts.

The purpose of this article was to measure the existing level of service quality and customer satisfaction of the resorts. Further, antecedents of the original SERVQUAL gaps were considered for this study to justify the result. Management perception of customer expectations and expected services from the perspective of customers was the major concern of this study as all antecedents begins for this point. Therefore, this study explored the original SERVQUAL gap to identify the remedies to eliminate or reduce the gaps to enhance the resorts performance.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are so many studies such as [5]-[10] done on the area of service quality, administration as well as customer satisfaction on the different international hospitality and leisure industries of the world. Gundersen et al. claimed that more than 900 research articles focus on customer behavior before three decades i.e. in between 1982 to 1990 [11]. The development of a customer relationship management policy requires a deep knowledge of customers' needs, behaviors, performance and new technologies as of the major drives of change in this context [8]. Enhanced customer satisfaction and relation lead to increased customer loyalty [8], their revisit, retaining and mouth referral (RRR). In Nepal, scholars are struggling to collect actual data and information from the government of Nepal (GON), Department of Tourism (DoT). Therefore, professionals are behind from actual scenarios of adequate education and training for quality service delivery and customers' satisfaction of Nepali resorts [12]. Some studies from the government level are focusing on the tourist standard star hotels [12] in Nepal. Basically, NATHM is one of the academic government institutions for Hotel Management. Other different subsequent institutions are also working by collaborating with each other. Nevertheless, the tourist standard Nepali resorts are still lagging behind from the formal study and research perspective.

Thus, this study is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What is the existing level of service quality and customer satisfaction in the resorts of Nepal?

RQ2: What are the antecedents of gaps on the basis of SERVQUAL Gap Model?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different scholars and theorists argued that the service quality is a value added to customer's needs [13]. But the service sector is widely increasing thereafter, and the importance of customers has also increased. So, the researchers and scholars accept service quality as an integral to customer satisfaction [14]-[15]. Parasuraman et al. [14] and Zeithaml et al. [15] elaborate three unique characteristics of service quality which are not conceptualized or evaluated - intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability. They define and conceptualize the service quality as a state of mind and attitude that results from a judgment or comparison of customer's expectation with performed performance [13]. Therefore, Parasuraman et al. developed a model to measure the service quality called SERVQUAL [14], which measures the gap between customer's expectations and their perception of actual performance [13] that constructs the perception of service quality.

Customer satisfaction is desired goods or services to fulfill customers' livelihood needs [16]. It is critical in all sectors, basically in the leisure and service sector [17]-[18]. In hospitality, it has always been considered with top priority for hotel operation, guest loyalty and brand recognition and it is also determined by both tangible and intangible attributes [19]. Thus, customer satisfaction as well as experience of imagination is complex phenomena inside the construct. Crotts et al. claims that customers are involved in different encounters of service which influence their unique expectations and evaluations [2]. So, the ability to meet or exceed the customer expectation is actually the key determinant of their satisfaction [7]. Therefore, satisfaction is a positive judgment of the customers after consuming any array of products or services, whereas a negative judgment is the output of dissatisfaction. Gundersen et al. provided evidence for the aforementioned claim by arguing that customer satisfaction is an evaluation made after the purchase of a particular good or service [11]. The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm of Oliver explains clearly customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction behavior on the basis of their attitude and expectation on the performed service [20]. So, the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (EDP) has become the worldwide applied model for assessment of customer behavior

[6], [19], [22]-[23] in the hospitality, leisure and other service sector. Originally, cognitive dissonance theory was thought of as an appropriate theory on customer satisfaction, but later Oliver developed expectancy-disconfirmation model [20] which described the satisfaction as resulting from a subjective comparison of the expected and received products or service attributes [26]. This has now become a dominant model to predict or determine customer satisfaction.

Yuksel and Yuksel further explore that customer judge their satisfaction in relation to values and desire, which is related to Value Percept Theory [22]-[23]. Other scholars suggest the standard used in the predictive expectation (EDP), or experience-based norms (The Comparison Level Theory). Some suggest that satisfaction is the result of the comparison between inputs and outputs (Equity Theory). Pooya et al. argued that customer satisfaction is critical for all sectors [24]. Thus, being a post-consumption cognitive judgment, satisfaction is the cause of existence as well as development of any origin around the globe. Not only hospitality and leisure, hospitals, schools, universities and other governmental and non-governmental service sectors are also considered as a crucial component inside the organizational settings [2].

IV. RESEARCH METHOD

a. Sample Selection and Sample Size

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, and data were collected during 2023 through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms. Two respondent groups were targeted: resort employees, who rated the service quality actually delivered, and customers who had stayed at least one night, because a single day-visit does not provide a sufficient basis for reliable feedback on a resort's services. Respondents were drawn from the three officially categorized resort tiers in Nepal; General, Deluxe, and Luxury—using a proportionate stratified approach across these tiers to reduce category bias; within each tier, employees and customers who met the inclusion criteria and voluntarily consented were recruited. Because the questionnaire was self-administered online, the procedure is more accurately described as proportionate stratified sampling with voluntary (self-selected) response rather than strict probability random sampling, and this is acknowledged as a limitation. Inclusion criteria were, for employees, current employment in a sampled resort with direct guest-service responsibilities and, for customers, an overnight stay of at least one night during the study period; exclusion criteria were incomplete submissions and responses that failed attention or consistency checks. Univariate outliers (standardized scores beyond $|z| > 3.29$) were removed during data screening. For the employee sample, the sampling frame was the reported population of 1,320 employees working in resorts of Bagmati Province [12]; applying Yamane's formula, $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, at a 95% confidence level ($e = 0.05$) yields a required minimum of approximately 307 respondents. A total of 311 employee and 309 customer questionnaires were received; after screening and outlier removal, 303 employees and 303 customers ($N = 606$) were retained for analysis, thereby satisfying the required sample size while maintaining a proportionate distribution across the General, Deluxe, and Luxury tiers.

b. Sources of Data

The primary data were used from structured survey questionnaires and secondary data were used from different literature of service quality and customer satisfaction. The SERVQUAL instrument was contextualized and constructed through the Modified Delphi Technique using the ten anonymous Nepali stakeholders and experts. Three stages of Modified Delphi Technique were rigorously followed to modify the SERVQUAL instrument to establish the reliability and validity. The questionnaires were distributed to resort employees and customer through online. It should be noted that the classical SERVQUAL model comprises five components; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; and treats expectation as the reference standard (E) against which perceived performance (P) is compared. In this study, 'expectation' is retained additionally as a distinct sixth component rather than solely as the comparison term. This adaptation emerged directly from the three-stage Modified Delphi Technique, in which the ten Nepali anonymous stakeholders and experts identified experience-based norms and service-quality standards; predictive standards, ideal standards, and real-brand standards or experience-based norms specific to the resort context as a substantive service attribute that customers evaluate in its own right, distinct from the $(P - E)$ disconfirmation arithmetic. Because resort experiences in Nepal are strongly shaped by nature-, culture-, and wellbeing-based encounters that generate context-specific expectation norms, this contextual dimension was assessed using a dedicated set of five items (Items 25 to 29) embedded within the questionnaire. Notably, the $(P - E)$ disconfirmation gap was computed for each of the six components comprising the contextualized SERVQUAL model. While expectation was also treated as an independent contextual item, this dual function neither duplicated nor replaced its use in the overall disconfirmation score of the customers. This role is treated as a deliberate methodological adaptation and is revisited in the limitations of this study.

c. Data Analysis Tools

Two sets of questionnaires were used for data collection. The Service Quality Survey Questionnaire (QSSQ) was used to measure the service quality and the Customer Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire (CSSQ) was used to measure customer satisfaction of the resorts. 29 question statements were used for this study including all six components of the contextualized and aligned SERVQUAL instruments. The same question statement was asked to the respondent employees and customers to measure the service quality and customer satisfaction. The components, definition and number of question statements has been presented in the Table No. 1.

TABLE I
THE MODIFIED SERVQUAL COMPONENTS AND DEFINITION.

Components	Definition of Components	Used Items
Tangibility	The presence of physical amenities, modern equipment, employees, and communications materials.	01 to 05 = 5
Reliability	The ability to perform the promised service consistently and accurately to the customers	06 to 11 = 6
Responsiveness	The willingness to help and provide prompt service to the customers.	12 to 15 = 4
Assurance	The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.	16 to 19 = 4
Empathy	Personal caring and individualized attention to the customers during service delivery at work place.	20 to 24 = 5
Expectation	Service quality standard, prediction standard, ideal standard, and real brand standard or experience-based norms of the customer.	25 to 29 = 5
Total items (question statements) of modified SERVQUAL instrument		29

After rigorously conducting the three stages of Modified Delphi Technique, 29 question statement out of 31 were accepted which was proposed by 10 stakeholders and experts to measure the service quality and customer satisfaction of Nepali resorts [25]. The reliability, internal consistency, and validity of the questionnaire were established prior to full deployment. Content validity was secured through the three-stage Modified Delphi Technique, in which the 10 stakeholders and experts rigorously rated and refined the items until consensus was reached, and was quantified using the item and scale-level Content Validity Index (I-CVI and S-CVI). Construct validity was examined through the dimensional structure of the six contextualized components. Internal consistency was assessed in a pilot test using Cronbach's alpha computed separately for each scale and dimension; all dimensions - tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and expectation as well as the overall QSSQ and CSSQ instruments returned alpha coefficients above the accepted threshold ($\alpha > 0.70$) [27], confirming that the instruments were reliable and valid for measuring the service quality and customer satisfaction of the resorts.

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

a. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics was employed to answer the research questions of this paper. To address the existing level of service quality and customer satisfaction, descriptive statistics of six component of the contextualized SERVQUAL instrument such as: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and expectation was considered from the perspective of employees and customers. In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential procedures were applied to strengthen the analysis. The significance of the perception–expectation gap for each dimension was tested using paired-samples t-tests (P versus E), and differences in service-quality and satisfaction scores across the three resort categories (General, Deluxe, and Luxury) were examined using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc comparisons. A dimension-wise gap analysis (reported in Table 7) quantifies the magnitude and direction of each SERVQUAL gap, and effect sizes are reported alongside p-values to convey practical, not merely statistical, significance. The corresponding test statistics (t or F, degrees of freedom, and p-values) are presented with the associated result tables (2 to 7).

b. Existing Level of Service Quality

For analyzing the existing level of service quality in Nepali resorts, mean and standard deviation (SD) score were used. The analyzing criteria were categorized by dividing the result of highest possible mean score minus the lowest mean score by 5, which gives an interval of 0.8 [28]. The criteria for the analysis are presented as the Table No. 2:

TABLE II
SCORING LEVEL OF CONSENSUS BENCHMARK.

S. No	Mean Score	Level of Consensus
1	1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree
2	1.81 – 2.60	Disagree
3	2.61 – 3.40	Undecided/Don't Know
4	3.41 – 4.20	Agree
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree

The mean value and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The mean was used to measure the central tendency and the variability of data-response was assessed by standard deviation. The result is presented in the Table 3:

TABLE III
EMPLOYEES' RATING ON EXISTING LEVEL OF SERVICE QUALITY.

Service Quality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	303	4.50	0.34636
Reliability	303	4.55	0.33322
Responsiveness	303	4.54	0.36575
Assurance	303	4.57	0.36234
Empathy	303	4.54	0.36103
Expectation	303	4.54	0.35689
Average Service Quality	303	4.54	0.28625
Valid N (listwise)	303		

According to 303 sample respondent service providers (Employees) of the resorts of Bagmati province, existing average service quality mean score of Nepali resorts was 4.54 and standard deviation was 0.28625. It included tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and expectation components. Tangibility mean score was 4.50 with 0.34636 divergence; reliability mean score was 4.55 with 0.33322 divergence; responsiveness mean score was 4.54 with 0.36575 divergence; assurance mean score was 4.57 with 0.36234 divergence; empathy mean score was 4.54 with 0.36103 divergence; and expectation mean score also was observed 4.54 with 0.35689 divergence. Existing level of average service quality of the resorts lies on (4.21-5.00) strongly agreed scale of the employees [28]. Therefore, considering the grading process of [28], [29], overall average service quality of the resorts was excellent.

Similarly, existing level of service quality of the resorts was high mean on the service quality in assurance (4.57). It indicates that most of the employees were more focused to fulfill the requirement that was related to their courteous intrinsic behavior (the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence) to the customers rather than other components of service quality. Nevertheless, most of the employees were in the same page of thought on service quality in reliability as the standard deviation (divergence) was (0.33322) lower than others.

1. Customer's Expected Service Quality in Nepali Resorts

According to the service quality literature, nature of service quality always depends upon the perception or expectation of the customers [21]. Therefore, the expected mean and standard deviation of customer expectation was analyzed to conduct the customer's satisfaction, which has been presented in Table 4:

TABLE IV
EXPECTED SERVICE QUALITY IN NEPALI RESORTS.

Service Quality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	303	4.42	0.57283
Reliability	303	4.45	0.56774
Responsiveness	303	4.42	0.57854
Assurance	303	4.42	0.58116
Empathy	303	4.39	0.55116
Expectation	303	4.40	0.56708
Average Service Quality	303	4.41	0.52597
Valid N (listwise)	303		

Table 4 shows that expected average service quality mean score is 4.41 with 0.52597 divergence. It showed high level of customers' expectation was identified from the resorts of Nepal. To differentiate the modified SERVQUAL components, tangibility mean score was 4.42 with 0.57283 divergence; reliability was 4.45 with 0.56774 divergence; responsiveness was 4.42 with 0.57854 divergence; assurance was also identified 4.42 with 0.58116 divergence; empathy was 4.39 with 0.55116 divergence; and expectation component was observed 4.40 mean score with 0.56708 divergence. Average mean of expected service quality was 4.41, which lies in between (4.21-5.00) strongly agreed scale of the customers [28]. Therefore, overall average expectation of the customers from the resorts was very high. Similarly, highest expectation of the customers was indicated to the reliability component (4.45) of the service quality from the resorts. However, most of the resort customers were in the same page of thought on their empathy as the standard deviation was observed in the lower (0.55116) divergence.

2. Customer's Perceived Service Quality in Nepali Resorts

Service quality experienced by 303 sample customers was analyzed to measure perceived service quality of the resorts. Throughout the modified SERVQUAL dimensions, customers' consensus benchmark was identified to determine the perceived service quality of the customers. Therefore, mean and standard deviation of performed service quality of the resorts was analyzed to conduct the customer's satisfaction, which has been presented in Table 5:

TABLE V
PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY IN NEPALI RESORTS.

Service Quality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	303	3.55	0.97481
Reliability	303	3.60	0.90071
Responsiveness	303	3.64	0.88461
Assurance	303	3.62	0.90274
Empathy	303	3.59	0.88764
Expectation	303	3.59	0.90937
Average Service Quality	303	3.60	0.85571
Valid N (listwise)	303		

According to 303 sample respondents service receiver (Customers) of the resorts of Bagmati province, actual perceived average service quality mean score of Nepali resorts was 3.60 and standard deviation was 0.85571. It includes assurance, empathy, expectation, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibility, components that was identified by the literature [14-15] and conceptualized and aligned through modified Delphi technique. Tangibility mean score was 3.55 with 0.97481 divergence; reliability mean score was 3.60 with 0.90071 divergence; responsiveness mean score was 3.64 with 0.88461 divergence; assurance mean score was 3.62 with 0.90274 divergence; empathy mean score was 3.59 with 0.88764 divergence; and expectation mean score was also observed 3.59 with 0.90937 divergence. Hence, existing level of actual service quality average of the resorts lies on (3.41 – 4.20) agreed scale of the resort customers [28]. Therefore, customer rated average performed service quality of the resorts in Nepal was acceptable and good enough [29]. Hence, the result of perceived service quality, most of the resorts customers experienced/perceived the higher service quality in responsiveness (3.64) component of service quality of the resorts. Most of them were in the same line of thoughts on responsiveness as the standard deviation of responsiveness was (0.88461) observed in the lower divergence.

3. Existing Level of Customer Satisfaction

Service quality was the major determinant factor of customer satisfaction. For Parasuraman et al. increase in customer satisfaction come from high service quality [14]. Lee et al. also accepts it [30]. Adhikari claimed that the satisfaction has positive correlation to the service quality in different organizational settings [31]. In the resorts of Nepal, the mean score of actual service quality is low from the expectation of the customers. Parasuraman et al. suggested that customers' often have high expectations, and therefore, continuous improvement is necessary [14].

Oliver set the expectancy disconfirmation theory [20] and this theory explains the satisfaction as a result of subjective comparison of expected and received attributes of products or services [26]. Bello et al. expanded Oliver expectancy disconfirmation theory by dividing the satisfaction process into three categories: extreme satisfaction, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction [21] and [20]. If the perceived performance exceeded the expectation, customers are extremely satisfied [21]. Therefore, technically, differences between perceived performance and customers' expectation determine the satisfaction of the customer. Thus, differences in mean and standard deviation of perceived service quality and expected service quality of customers were analyzed to find out the customer's satisfaction, which has been presented Table 6:

TABLE VI
EXISTING LEVEL OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN NEPALI RESORTS

(Perceived Performance - Expectation) = Satisfaction	N	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	303	-0.87	1.15573
Reliability	303	-0.84	1.07874
Responsiveness	303	-0.78	1.06059
Assurance	303	-0.79	1.05940
Empathy	303	-0.80	1.06223
Expectation	303	-0.81	1.11675
Average Mean of Satisfaction	303	-0.81	1.02520
Valid N (listwise)	303		

Table 6 shows the mean score difference with standard deviation of service quality components and items to identify the customers' satisfaction of the resorts. Average satisfactions mean score was -0.81 with 1.02520 standard deviation including all components. Tangibility satisfaction mean score was -0.87 with 1.15573 divergence; reliability satisfaction mean score was -0.84 with 1.07874 divergence; responsiveness satisfaction mean score was -0.78 with 1.06059 divergence; assurance satisfaction mean score was -0.79 with 1.05940 divergence; empathy satisfaction mean score was -0.80 with 1.06223 divergence; and expectation satisfaction mean score was observed -0.81 that constitute 1.11675 divergence. All components of satisfaction level seems less than the expectation of the customer. Thus, there is a need for continuous improvement [14] and [32] on the all components of service quality in the resorts of Nepal from the perspective of customer satisfaction.

Overall observation on the result of customer satisfaction, most of the customers were high satisfied on service quality in terms of responsiveness (-0.78) considering to the other components of service quality. Most of them were in the same page of thought on service quality in terms of assurance as the standard deviation was (1.05940) observed with lower divergence. However, all component of satisfaction mean were in negative values. It represents that Nepali resorts were not able to meet or exceed the customer's expectations [14] and [32] as it was higher than actual performance.

4. Gaps on Total Customer Satisfaction in Nepali Resorts

Antecedents of gaps between the expected service quality and perceived service quality play the vital role on customer satisfaction [31]. Different type of gaps is explored by Lee et al. on their study of SERVQUAL gap model [33]. Perceived service quality represents the perception antecedent or gap between service provider and service taker (Model Gap 1) regarding the service quality or perception of employees and customers on expected service quality [31] to be delivered. Hence, to maximize satisfaction, antecedents of gaps regarding perception on different service quality components: assurance, empathy, expectation, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibility, should be reduced [31] and [33].

According to the literature, perceived service quality is actually generated from different means of commutations, personal needs, and experience-based norms of the customers [33], [31]. Therefore, every customer's personal needs, communication and experience can be different that leads to the perceived service quality. It results to create the gaps and there is a need to improvement in different component of service quality. Yet, some differences or gaps on different components of service quality were identified regarding the total observation of customer satisfaction in Nepali resorts, which has been presented on Table 7:

TABLE VII
CUSTOMERS' EXPECTED AND PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY INCLUDING THEIR SATISFACTION

Service Quality with Components	No. of customers	Mean of Performance Level (P)	Mean of Expectation Level (E)	Mean of Satisfaction Level (P-E)	SD of Satisfaction Level
Tangibility	303	3.5531	4.4185	-0.8653	1.15573
Reliability	303	3.6012	4.4461	-0.8449	1.07874
Responsiveness	303	3.6353	4.4167	-0.7814	1.06059
Assurance	303	3.6246	4.4150	-0.7904	1.05940
Empathy	303	3.5941	4.3921	-0.7980	1.06223
Expectation	303	3.5921	4.3974	-0.8053	1.11675
Average Mean	303	3.6001	4.4143	-0.8142	1.02520

Table 7 shows the gaps between performance (P) and expectation (E) regarding the perception gap of service quality [31], which determine the customer satisfaction (P-E = S). To satisfy the customers, the perceived performance should be exactly equal to the expectation of the customer [21]. Overall observations on the average mean of customer satisfaction, all components of service quality observed in the negative values. Therefore, needs of continuous improvement in the service quality of Nepali resorts fulfill the (differences) gaps on service quality components that represents the less service quality than the expectation of the customers.

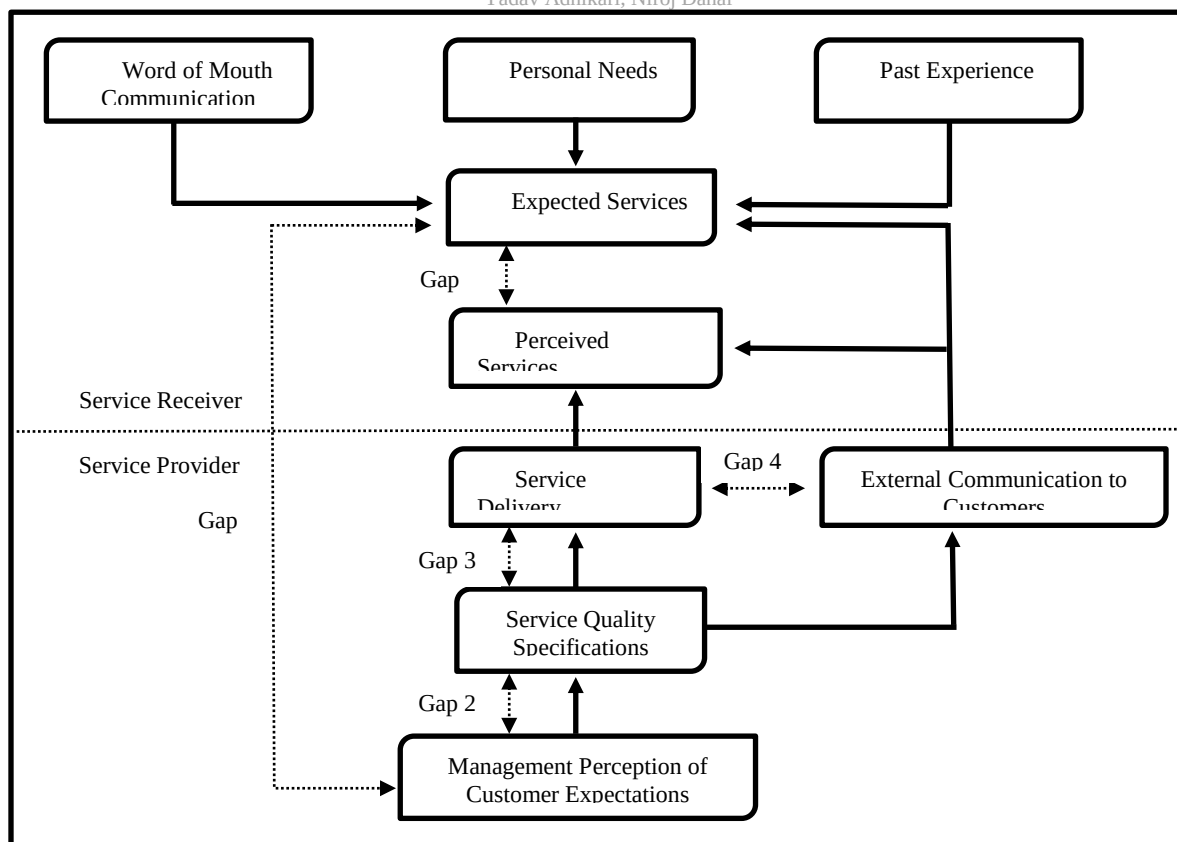


Fig. 1: The SERVQUAL Gap Model.
Source: [31, p. 72].

In the above Figure 1 five gaps are presented on the service quality. Brief discussion under antecedents of gaps is presented in the upcoming section below:

5. Antecedents of Gap

To explore the antecedents of gaps on service quality possible gaps during the time-of-service performance may occur due to the mismatch of expectation and performance between the management and their customers. These antecedents are not treated only conceptually; each is read against the study's empirical evidence. The uniformly negative satisfaction scores (average $P - E = -0.81$) and the persistent gap between employees' high self-rated service quality ($M = 4.54$) and customers' lower perceived performance ($M = 3.60$) provide direct, resort-level evidence of the management-perception gap (Gap 1) in the sampled resorts. The dimension-specific shortfalls—largest in tangibility (-0.87) and reliability (-0.84)—further localize where the downstream gaps (Gaps 2 to 4) are most pronounced, so that the following discussion of antecedents is anchored in the observed data rather than in the literature alone. Both prospective from the side of service provider and customers on service quality gap of SERVQUAL is summarize as follows:

i. Management Perception Gap

The management perception gap is the difference between what managers think customers want and what customers actually want, as illustrated in Gap 1 of the referenced framework. Williams posits that this gap arises when service providers lack insight into their customers' true needs [9]. Consequently, this disconnect hampers service providers' ability to tailor their offerings to meet customer requirements effectively [9]. This gap is characterized by both internal disconfirmation (within the service provider) and external disconfirmation (from the customer's perspective). So, Gap 1 includes the following antecedents or possible causes:

Insufficient Market Research. A primary cause of Gap 1 is inadequate market research. When organizations fail to conduct thorough investigations into customer preferences and expectations, they risk misaligning their services with actual customer needs [31]. Effective market research should include comprehensive data collection methods such as surveys, customer panels, and feedback mechanisms.

Poor Service Recovery. Another contributing factor is ineffective service recovery processes. When customers express dissatisfaction, how an organization addresses these complaints is critical. Oliver emphasizes that timely and effective complaint resolution can provide valuable insights into customer perceptions [20], thereby assisting in bridging the management perception gap.

Weak Relationship Marketing. The third factor is a lack of strong relationship marketing strategies. Building enduring relationships with customers rather than viewing them as one-time transactions can significantly reduce this gap. Dhimar notes that stronger customer relationships lead to increased loyalty and a better understanding of customer needs.

ii. *Service Quality Specification Gap*

The service quality specification gap (Gap 2) emerges from a misalignment between management's perception of what customers expect and the actual service quality specifications implemented within various organizational contexts. This gap arises when service providers do not adequately understand customer needs, leading to insufficiently designed service encounters [9]. The service quality specification gap represents an internal disconfirmation within service organizations. Antecedents of Service quality specification Gaps are:

Poor Management Commitment. Gap 2 refers to the misalignment between service delivery standards and customer expectations, primarily caused by upper management's insufficient commitment to customer-focused policies and their failure to allocate necessary resources for quality improvements [31].

Ineffective Service Design. Additionally, inadequate service design processes contribute to this gap. If new service developments are approached without a systematic framework, it can lead to ambiguity and confusion among employees regarding service delivery standards [31]. Clear and structured approach to service design is essential for operational practices alignment with customer expectations.

In summary, addressing both the management perception gap and the service quality specification gap is crucial for organizations aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Using good market study ways, smart ways to deal with issues, and making strong ties with buyers can help close these holes and make the whole service better.

iii. *Service Delivery Gap*

The service delivery gap shows the space between what the service quality should be and what is really given to people in service groups. This gap is primarily an internal issue faced by service providers. As depicted in Gap 3 of Figure 1, managers can identify and address the disconfirmation aspects of service delivery. Several antecedents contribute to this gap:

Employee Role Fulfillment. A significant factor contributing to Gap 3 is the failure of employees to fulfill their roles effectively. According to Dhimar, when employees do not meet customer expectations in service delivery, this gap can arise [31]. Therefore, it is essential for the service industry to recruit and train employees adequately to ensure timely and effective service delivery.

Demand and Supply Mismatch. Another critical reason for Gap 3 is the inability of service providers to align demand with supply. Dhimar argues that services cannot be stored or inventoried [31]; thus, a lack of demand can lead to losses, while excess demand can result in missed sales opportunities and revenue. To mitigate this issue, it is crucial for service organizations to establish a proper balance between demand and supply.

iv. *Market Communication Gap*

The market communication gap, illustrated in Gap 4 of Figure 1, represents the inconsistency between actual service delivery and the external communications directed at consumers. This gap also reflects the internal disconfirmation experienced by service providers within an organization, which can be effectively addressed by communication managers. Several antecedents contribute significantly to this issue within service organizations.

Planning Problems. One major factor contributing to Gap 4 is inadequate planning. As noted by Dhimar, when operational personnel are not engaged in marketing communication initiatives, the promises made may become unrealistic or exaggerated [31]. To mitigate this gap, Dhimar recommends employing authentic advertising strategies that feature real customers, genuine testimonials, and actual employees [31].

Over-promising. One key cause of Gap 4 is the habit to promise too much. Often, marketing person may say more than what they can truly do as they are pushed by the need to win or get new work. This habit of promising more than what can be delivered can show up in ads, direct selling. To fix this gap, Dhimar points out that service givers need to make sure what they offer matches what they said in their ads [31].

v. *Perceived Service Quality Gap*

The perceived service quality gap, often referred to as Gap 5 in the service quality model, primarily arises from discrepancies between customer expectations and their actual experiences. This gap manifests when the needs and anticipated services of customers do not align with the service delivery offered by organizations. Such a misalignment poses significant challenges for service providers, as highlighted by Lee et al. [33] and [34], who advocate for the inclusion of additional gaps—Gap 8, Gap 9, and Gap 10—to comprehensively assess service quality from the perspectives of managers, customers, and service providers.

Dhimar elaborates that this gap emerges when the services perceived or experienced by customers diverge from their expectations. Misinterpretations of service quality may occur due to external pressures or biases affecting clients' perceptions [31]. To mitigate Gap 5, it is essential for companies to engage in customer education regarding the effective utilization of services across various encounters. Therefore, implementing training and orientation programs for customers is crucial in bridging this gap and enhancing overall service quality.

VI. DISCUSSION

Williams argued that gaps 1 to 4 of figure 1 could rectify and improve from the 5 gaps of Zeithaml et al.'s by the service provider through refining the services to be delivered [9] and [15]. Hence, the finding of the study showed that Nepali resorts should focus on reducing or eliminating the antecedents of gaps and refining and rectifying the services on the gap no 1 to 4 to meet or exceed the customers' expectations. Likewise, continuous improvement is also required, as per the literature on service quality [10], [14], [15], [19], [32] to meet or exceed the customer expectation of the delivered service of the resorts.

To clarify the linkage of the original SERVQUAL gap model to the service quality of the resorts, antecedents of gaps were required. Therefore, the researcher linked to the 5 gaps of the original SERVQUAL, which was justified by this study's findings. The first reason for the management perception gap (Gap 1) could be insufficient market research that involved collecting information about the customer's expectations [31]. Similarly, the second reason for Gap 1 could be poor service recovery that involved the views or customer's opinions at the time-of-service delivery, and the third reason for Gap 1 could be poor relationship marketing that involved building a strong relationship with the customers rather than just dealing with them as one-time buyers [31]. Though, the perceived service quality of the resorts was not met or exceed the customers' expectations in this study due to misaligned management's perception of the customer's expectations. Williams observed that gaps 1 to 4 can rectify or improve as other gaps (2-4) are a by-product of Gap 1 [9]. Therefore, Nepal resorts were not adequately focused on the management perception gap and other antecedents regarding the service quality to satisfy their customers.

These findings are consistent with, and extend, prior service-quality research. The negative perception–expectation gaps across all dimensions echo Parasuraman et al. [14], [32] and Zeithaml et al. [15], who reported that customer expectations in service settings routinely exceed perceived performance, and align with Karki et al. [29], who found comparable shortfalls in the Nepali hotel sector. The contrast between employees' high self-rated service quality and customers' markedly lower perceptions supports Williams' [9] contention that Gaps 2–4 are largely by-products of Gap 1, and mirrors Lee et al. [30], [33], who linked perceived service-quality gaps to weaknesses in management perception and service specification. Theoretically, the study contributes empirical support for treating expectation as a context-specific dimension within a contextualized SERVQUAL model for resorts, complementing the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm [20]. Practically, the results imply that Nepali resorts should prioritize closing Gap 1 through structured market research, service-recovery systems, and relationship-marketing practices, and should target the tangibility and reliability dimensions—where the shortfalls were widest—rather than assuming uniformly adequate delivery. Rather than restating the tabulated means, the discussion therefore emphasizes what the gaps imply for management action and for the theoretical positioning of the contextualized instrument.

Adhikari described that Gap 5 occurs when the perceived or experienced-based services are not in line with customer expectations [31]. This gap arises when customers misinterpret the quality of the services. This can happen due to the clients/customers being pressurized or biased. Therefore, Gap 5 can be reduced if the company educates the customer to better use the administrated services in different encounters [31]. Still, the 'expectation' component of service quality was not met or exceed the customer's expectations. Therefore, Nepali resorts were not adequately focused on the 'expectation' component of service quality that includes experience-based norms of the customers.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

a. Conclusion

The resort employees of Bagmati province in Nepal perceived that they paid the best attention to the customers whereas the existing level of service quality from the employees' perspectives is seems excellent. The degree of the average mean of service quality is higher than the perceived mean of service quality of the resort. However, the actual (performed) service quality of the resorts is lower than the customer's expectation, while the expected service quality of the resort customers is very high, which leads to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Hence, overall performance is lower than the customer's expectation in the resorts of Nepal. Therefore, antecedents of gaps and management perception of customer expectations are still not aligned with the service performance of the resorts. Therefore, continuous improvement of service quality is required to satisfy their customers. Customer behavior depends upon situational attribution or phenomenon. Resorts are still weak to undertake the situational phenomenon to satisfy their customers. Regarding customer satisfaction, resort customers are neither focused on the cost of services nor their values, norms, or opinions; instead, they are focused on the employee's service performance (job-related) and prompt delivery of the services.

b. Implications

This study may apply to service quality, customer satisfaction, and employees' attitude regarding their performance in similar socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, the study findings may be generalizable in some cases of boutique hotels, star-rated hotels, restaurants, and other contextual tourist standard lodges of Nepal. Although the model developed after this survey study is not tested in Nepali boutique hotels, star-rated hotels and restaurants, or any other hospitality industry except Nepali resorts [25]. Therefore, in the future, the researchers can use this model in different categories of hospitality, leisure and service sectors. Secondly, this research is primarily based on the data collected through the service provider (employees) version of the question statement for assessing the service quality and resorts customer were the respondent for customer satisfaction in the same component of service quality. The future researcher can use a different component of the service quality version question statement for employees and customers that may enlarge the research dimension and validity of the findings. Thirdly, this article examined variables affect service quality and customer satisfaction, but there may also be other mediator or moderator variables that can affect service quality [35]. For example, discounts, happy hour in service, or other additional services also play a vital role in service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality and service sector.

In this study, the model of service quality and customer satisfaction was used to examine resort performance that led to retained (loyalty), revisit, and referral (RRR) objectives, which were explained at a low level. This indicates that many other factors have been affecting the resort's performance, which indicates the service quality and customer satisfaction. Lastly, the findings of this article identify the employees' service quality with different component of the contextualized SERVQUAL on the basis of customer satisfaction whereas other components may affect the service quality and customer satisfaction in the resorts [25]. To validate this statement, future research must identify what kind of different component leads to service quality and customer satisfaction. Then only service quality and customer satisfaction can be linked to the other predictor inside the hospitality and service sector. For example, other predictor can be cultural issues and inherent human values. Therefore, this research opens the possibility of incorporating research aligning with service quality, customer satisfaction, and culture as well as inherent human selfless service and their values as research content for future study.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This article can be a reference for in educational institutions of hospitality and different academia of Nepal from the educational perspective as few or no such research is available in this context. Internationally, different research studies are available on service quality and customer satisfaction. The researchers can focus on addressing many other domains, such as tourist standard lodges, star-rated city hotels, boutique hotels, restaurant business, or different domain of hospitality and leisure sectors that may contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding service quality and customer satisfaction of this industry. Therefore, future researchers can carry out research that may focus on the following issues: First, this article was delimited to the Bagmati province of Nepal, future researchers can extend the scope of generalization by taking a wider population in terms of geographic aspect. Since it was delimited to Nepali categorized standard tourist resorts, including general, deluxe, and luxury, it narrowed its scope of generalization in the hospitality industry.

IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The contextualized SERVQUAL model has been used to measure the service quality and the customer satisfaction [25]. Basically, satisfaction was realized and quantified from the evaluative judgement of the customer after consuming specific product or services (perceived performance minus expectation of the customers) and service quality was realized from the perspective of resort employees. Therefore, the findings can be taken as reference only for standardizing service components of the contextualized SERVQUAL [25] model to meet or exceed the customer's expectations to foster the resorts' performance.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Research Committee of the Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal, has granted approval for this study on July 25, 2022 (Ref. No. PhD Re-Reg-021).

Transparency

The authors state that the paper is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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