

## Exploring the Correlation Between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry

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### ABSTRACT

The term "service quality" denotes the extent of excellence or satisfaction discerned by a customer during their engagement with a service provider or utilization of a service. In parallel, "customer satisfaction" encompasses a comprehensive evaluation of a customer's holistic contentment, perception, and fulfillment arising from their interactions with a product, service, or brand. These concepts are pivotal within the domain of consumer research, serving as fundamental metrics for assessing and understanding the dynamics of customer-provider relationships and the broader marketplace landscape. The study tends to explore the factors affecting customer satisfaction and effect of service quality on customer satisfaction. This study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature by investigating the correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction. The studies have shown that customer satisfaction plays a partial mediating role in the association between service quality and loyalty, suggesting that diminished service quality is linked to a decline in customer loyalty. Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that the five dimensions of service quality have varying degrees of impact on customer satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Hospital Industry*

Service Quality is a composite term that combines two distinct components: "service" and "quality." "Service" refers to any intangible activity or benefit offered by one party to another which does not result in ownership. On the other hand, "quality" has evolved as a strategic tool for achieving operational efficiency and enhancing overall business performance. In the context of service quality, it signifies a service provider's capacity to satisfy customers, efficiently contributing to improved business performance.

Within the service sector, the concept of "quality" is integral to the success of a business. Its significance is underscored by its positive correlation with profits, increased market share, and customer satisfaction. Previous studies and various authors have highlighted that the concept of quality in services differs from that in the goods sector. This distinction arises from inherent characteristics of services, such as intangibility, inseparability from the provider, and heterogeneity. Consequently, a unique framework is essential for explicating and measuring service quality. Oliver (1997) argues that service quality can be described as

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the result of customer comparisons between their expectations about the service they will use and their perceptions about the service company.

Service quality pertains to the level of excellence or satisfaction that a customer encounters during their interaction with a service provider or utilization of a service. According to Danish (2018), service quality involves the evaluative process that aligns customer expectations with the actual delivery of the service. Elvira and Shpetim (2016) defined service quality as an evaluative mechanism to gauge performance over an extended duration.

### ***Determinants of Service Quality***

Service quality encompasses several vital dimensions, each crucial in shaping the customer experience. Reliability is fundamental, emphasizing consistent and accurate service delivery to build trust. Responsiveness involves prompt and effective customer support, demonstrating a commitment to meeting their needs. Assurance focuses on the competence and credibility of service personnel, instilling confidence. Empathy is vital, showcasing understanding and care for individual customer concerns, which is particularly important in fields like healthcare.

Tangibles, such as facilities and appearance, contribute to the perception of professionalism and quality, especially in hospitality industries. Consistency is essential for uniform service quality across interactions and locations, while the efficiency of the service process plays a crucial role in ensuring a smooth experience. Effective communication fosters transparency and clarity between service providers and customers.

Customer feedback is actively sought and incorporated for continuous improvement, and leveraging technology and innovation enhances service delivery. Ultimately, businesses aim to continually assess and enhance service quality through feedback, surveys, and direct observations. This commitment is driven by exceeding customer expectations, building loyalty, and staying competitive in the dynamic market.

### ***Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction is a comprehensive measure of a customer's overall contentment, perception, and fulfillment resulting from their interactions with a product, service, or brand. It encompasses various dimensions and is influenced by the customer's expectations, experiences, and emotional responses. Anderson and Sullivan (1993, p. 126) define customer satisfaction as “post-purchase evaluation of product quality given repurchase expectations.”

In 2016, Elvira and Shpetim described customer satisfaction as the customer's response to a received service, influenced by personal expectations and the actual performance of the service. Conversely, Farooq and Salam (2018) defined customer satisfaction as aligning or surpassing a service's performance with customer expectations. When a service fails to meet customer expectations, dissatisfaction is typically the outcome.

Customer satisfaction, as a multifaceted concept, initiates with the expectations customers bring into an interaction, influenced by past experiences, marketing communications, word-of-mouth, and perceived product or service value. These preconceived notions set the stage for the customer's anticipated experience and shape overall satisfaction.

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The experience during and after the interaction holds substantial weight in determining customer satisfaction. This encompasses the product's quality, performance, reliability, and user-friendliness, along with the service's professionalism, helpfulness, and responsiveness. Emotional responses intertwine with the satisfaction equation, as customer feelings during and after the interaction can significantly impact their overall satisfaction. Positive emotions like delight and joy tend to enhance satisfaction, while negative emotions such as frustration or disappointment may lead to dissatisfaction.

Evaluation of customer satisfaction often involves comparing the perceived quality and value of the received product or service to the initial expectations. Customer satisfaction is likely to ensue when the experience meets or exceeds expectations. Conversely, staying within expectations can result in satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is not confined to a singular transaction; it is viewed through a long-term lens. Satisfied customers are more inclined to exhibit loyalty, continue engaging with the company over time, foster repeat purchases, and elevate customer lifetime value.

Businesses use surveys, feedback forms, Net Promoter Score (NPS), and online reviews to measure and gauge customer satisfaction. This feedback-driven approach aids in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to assess satisfaction levels and identify areas for improvement. High levels of customer satisfaction are intricately linked to customer loyalty and advocacy, as satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the product or service to others, contributing positively to word-of-mouth marketing.

Finally, businesses perceive customer satisfaction as a driving force for continuous improvement. Feedback from dissatisfied customers catalyzes enhancing products, services, and processes to better align with customer needs and preferences. This dedication to continual enhancement solidifies customer satisfaction and positions businesses for a competitive advantage, reducing customer churn and expanding market share for sustainable growth and success.

### ***Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction is subject to a myriad of influences, both tangible and intangible, as elucidated in studies by Al-Karim and Chowdhury (2014), Rita et al. (2019), and Fida (2020). Various factors emerged from these investigations, including the physical infrastructure, service timeliness, hotel staff demeanor, equipment availability, communication methods, responsiveness to customer issues, operational efficiency, data precision, service consistency, speed of problem resolution, attention to detail, staff adaptability, willingness to provide customer assistance, staff conduct, customer safety, politeness, staff competency, personalized customer care, continual service availability, and an understanding of individual guest preferences.

Customer satisfaction hinges on many intrinsic and extrinsic factors to the product or service. Paramount among these is the inherent quality of the offering, where consistency in meeting or surpassing customer expectations lays the foundation for contentment. Equally crucial is how customers are treated by the service provider's personnel, with affable, helpful, and responsive customer service proving instrumental in elevating satisfaction levels.

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The timeliness of product or service delivery emerges as a pivotal factor, as delays or prolonged wait times can precipitate dissatisfaction. The economic aspect is significant, where customers evaluate the equilibrium between the price paid and the perceived value received, with fair pricing and perceived value contributing substantively to satisfaction. Effective and transparent communication regarding product or service features, benefits, and any alterations or issues is another factor in shaping satisfaction.

Convenience in accessing and utilizing the product or service is paramount, and businesses prioritizing ease for their customers tend to witness heightened satisfaction levels. Customizing offerings to align with individual customer preferences fosters a sense of value and contributes positively to satisfaction. Reliability and consistency in delivering as promised, positive brand reputation, adept problem resolution, and the proactive seeking and incorporation of customer feedback also play pivotal roles in shaping satisfaction levels.

Additionally, a comparative evaluation against competitors, an understanding of cultural and demographic influences, technological enhancements, social and environmental responsibility, the establishment of emotional connections with customers, and the impact of word-of-mouth and online reviews are integral facets influencing customer satisfaction. Recognizing the interconnectivity of these factors and acknowledging their varying significance across industries and customer segments, successful businesses engage in ongoing research to comprehend evolving customer needs and preferences. This iterative process enables businesses to enhance their offerings consistently and, in turn, augment customer satisfaction.

### ***Importance of Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction holds paramount significance for businesses and organizations for several reasons. Firstly, it fosters customer loyalty, reducing the likelihood of customers switching to competitors and ensuring repeat business, thereby contributing to consistent revenue streams. Additionally, satisfied customers become loyal patrons, resulting in one-time transactions and sustained, repeat business, reinforcing overall profitability.

Moreover, customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in generating positive word-of-mouth marketing. Satisfied customers tend to recommend a business to their social circles, facilitating new customer acquisition and expanding market reach. Building on this, a track record of customer satisfaction contributes to an enhanced reputation for the business or brand, attracting new customers and instilling trust in potential buyers.

Furthermore, high customer satisfaction reduces customer churn, saving businesses the costs of acquiring new customers to replace lost ones. This, in turn, offers a competitive advantage as businesses that consistently satisfy customers can charge premium prices, expand their market share, and outperform competitors. The cost savings extend to the operational domain, where satisfied customers necessitate less support, service recovery, and fewer returns or refunds, resulting in efficient resource utilization.

In addition to contributing to brand loyalty, customer satisfaction provides valuable feedback for improvement. Satisfied customers are more likely to offer insights businesses can leverage to enhance their products, services, and processes, fostering continuous improvement. This feedback-driven approach also reduces marketing costs, as satisfied

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customers require less effort to retain and upsell. They often become brand advocates, promoting the business to others.

Lastly, customer satisfaction contributes to the overall resilience of a business. A satisfied customer base fortifies businesses against adverse events, such as economic downturns or crises, as satisfied customers are more likely to withstand challenges alongside the business. In summary, customer satisfaction transcends being a mere metric to a strategic imperative impacting revenue, profitability, brand image, and long-term success. Consistently meeting or surpassing customer expectations enables businesses to cultivate a loyal and expanding customer base, thereby driving sustainable growth and establishing a formidable competitive advantage.

### ***How Service Quality Relates to Customer Satisfaction***

The nexus between service quality and customer satisfaction is intricately explored in the research conducted by Fida et al. in 2020. Their study establishes a significant correlation between service quality and customer happiness, emphasizing the pivotal role of five key dimensions: responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, reliability, and empathy. The research underscores the critical importance of continually enhancing these service quality dimensions to attain customer satisfaction (Fida et al., 2020).

In a parallel exploration, Gopi and Samat's 2020 study delves into the impact of service quality on the satisfaction of library users across various Swedish universities. The findings reveal that service quality holds a substantial influence, accounting for over 71% of library user satisfaction. Notably, the study highlights the pivotal role of service reliability in contributing significantly to user satisfaction, whereas the empathy dimension demonstrates a more limited effect (Gopi & Samat, 2020).

Service quality plays a pivotal role in shaping customer expectations, with perceived quality influencing the development of heightened expectations for future interactions. Conversely, subpar service quality can lower these expectations. The core determinant of customer satisfaction lies in aligning customer expectations and the service received. When service quality meets or surpasses expectations, it invariably leads to elevated customer satisfaction. A significant driver of customer satisfaction, service quality, when consistently maintained at a high level, fosters positive and satisfying customer experiences. This, in turn, results in heightened customer loyalty and an increased likelihood of repeat business. Additionally, service quality is integral to the perceived value of a product or service. When customers perceive that they are receiving high-quality service, they are more inclined to believe they are obtaining value for their money, contributing to overall satisfaction.

Conversely, poor service quality can give rise to customer complaints and dissatisfaction, potentially leading to customer churn. Service recovery, how a business addresses service failures, is critical in mitigating dissatisfaction. Practical service recovery efforts involving prompt and satisfactory resolution of issues can transform a dissatisfied customer into a contented one.

Consistently delivering high-quality service is synonymous with building long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfied customers are more likely to maintain a lasting association with a brand or business, thus contributing significantly to its enduring success.

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In this context, the invaluable role of customer feedback in shaping service quality cannot be overstated. Such feedback serves as a crucial feedback loop, enabling businesses to identify areas for improvement, refine their services, and continually enhance customer satisfaction.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Slack et al., (2020) researched how service quality impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty in Fiji's supermarket sector, focusing on customer satisfaction as a mediator. Four hundred eighty supermarket customers in four urban areas participated in a survey. Results showed that customers perceive supermarket service quality as unsatisfactory. Additionally, service quality significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty, implying that lower service quality leads to reduced customer loyalty. This research guides supermarkets on improving customer loyalty in a competitive market. It can also inform government policies and help local supermarkets adapt to changing retail dynamics. This study adds to our understanding of the supermarket sector's service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.

Gopi et al., (2020) conducted a study that investigated how service quality in Malaysia's food truck industry impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty. It assesses how well food trucks meet customer needs using SERVQUAL attributes (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). With a quantitative approach, 100 randomly selected food truck customers completed a questionnaire, and data was analyzed using various methods. Results showed that customer satisfaction significantly influences three service quality attributes - tangibles, reliability, and assurance. Additionally, customer satisfaction has a significant impact on customer loyalty. In summary, this study underscores the importance of the physical aspects of food truck services, service reliability, and employee demeanor in building customer trust and loyalty.

Masrul (2019) researched how service quality impacts customer satisfaction in Bangladesh's tourism industry. It utilized a 5-point non-comparative Likert scale to measure variables and included 28 questions, encompassing the 22 questions from the original SERVQUAL scale and additional ones for measuring customer satisfaction. Data was collected from 100 respondents through convenience sampling. Analysis was conducted using SPSS 22.0 software, including descriptive, regression, and correlation analyses. The findings establish a strong connection between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. This study can provide valuable insights to policymakers for comprehensive planning and strategy development to enhance tourist services, ultimately contributing to Bangladesh's overall tourism development.

Mohamad et al., (2019) conducted a study to investigate how service quality and customer satisfaction directly and indirectly influence customer loyalty in the hotel industry in Indonesia, filling a gap in the existing literature. The research used a quantitative approach with 182 hotel customer respondents in Indonesia providing feedback on service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. PLS-SEM analysis was employed to examine the proposed model. The findings indicate that SERVQUAL (a measure of service quality) positively impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty. Likewise, customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty. The study also reveals that customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between SERVQUAL and customer loyalty. Consequently, this model can assist hotel operators in enhancing customer service programs to boost satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately increasing industry profitability. This research

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makes a valuable contribution to the hotel industry by validating the proposed structural model and offering insights into customer perceptions, aiding hotel operators in effectively integrating service quality to foster loyalty and satisfaction.

Myo et al. (2019) researched boosting guest loyalty to increase revenue, which is crucial for hotel operators. Many factors contribute to customer loyalty, with service quality and customer satisfaction being key in this research. This study delves into the connection between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty at Novotel Yangon Max Hotel, operated by Accor. Using Customer Loyalty and social exchange theories, the research explores how customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Employing SEM, 400 randomly selected Novotel Yangon Max hotel customers participated in a survey assessing the impact of service quality and customer satisfaction on loyalty. The study confirmed all hypotheses and discussed both theoretical and practical implications.

Hashem et al. (2019) conducted this study, which aimed to assess the quality of services provided by Jordanian dental clinics from the perspective of their customers and examine its impact on customer loyalty. Using a quantitative approach, the researchers employed the SERVPERF scale, which includes five service quality dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Questionnaires were distributed to 250 dental clinic customers in Jordan, with 194 responses collected (a response rate of 77.6%). Statistical analysis using SPSS revealed that customers perceive the quality of services in Jordanian dental clinics to be moderate, as assessed collectively and individually by the SERVPERF dimensions. Furthermore, the study found a statistically significant positive relationship between the quality of services in Jordanian dental clinics and customer loyalty. In light of these findings, the researchers recommend enhancing the quality of dental care services to meet or exceed customer expectations.

Fatima et al. (2018) conducted research that explores patient opinions on private healthcare providers, specifically focusing on hospital service quality. It analyzes how various quality measures affect patient satisfaction and loyalty, with patient satisfaction as a mediator. The study surveyed 611 patients from six private hospitals in Islamabad, Pakistan, using descriptive statistics, reliability tests, correlation, and regression analysis. Private healthcare providers in Islamabad are striving to improve services. Better service quality leads to higher patient satisfaction and loyalty. Aspects like the physical environment, customer-friendliness, responsiveness, communication, privacy, and safety positively influence patient loyalty, mediated by satisfaction. These findings guide hospital managers in enhancing healthcare service quality and addressing deficiencies, offering insights into patient attitudes, satisfaction, and loyalty. This study provides patient perspectives on healthcare service quality, examining its impact on satisfaction and loyalty in private hospitals.

Aung et al. (2016) conducted this research, which stressed the importance of training programs in the hospitality industry for better service and guest satisfaction. It recommended focusing on specific aspects of training content. The study aimed to evaluate guest perceptions of service quality in a hotel. Of the 590 distributed survey questionnaires, 94 usable responses were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and ANOVA. Demographically, most respondents were male (71.3%), aged 36 to 45 (30.9%), and held professional jobs (45.7%), with 25.5% having an income of \$11,001 or more. The study identified areas for training program improvement to enhance guest

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satisfaction. Satisfied guests tend to return, and investing in employee training can reduce turnover costs and boost motivation.

Rashid et al. (2015) conducted a study that examined how service quality and customer satisfaction affect customer loyalty in Malaysian fast-food restaurants, highlighting the growing importance of customer loyalty for competitive advantage. Data from 300 respondents in four major cities were collected with a 100% response rate. The results show a significant connection between service quality and customer satisfaction with customer loyalty, offering insights for the fast-food industry to enhance customer satisfaction and maintain loyalty, thereby increasing market share.

Markovic et al. (2014) conducted a study that examines service quality and customer satisfaction in non-profit healthcare, specifically specialty hospitals and health spas in Croatia entering the health tourism market. Despite their importance in the Croatian health system, this sector needs more research. The research aims to understand how service quality influences customer satisfaction in healthcare. Using empirical research, a specialty medical rehabilitation hospital was evaluated using the SERVQUAL instrument, with 104 completed questionnaires collected. Results showed that patients generally found the healthcare quality satisfactory. Higher service quality led to greater patient satisfaction and loyalty. The study confirmed the SERVQUAL model's usefulness in healthcare quality assessment. This research contributes to a relatively unexplored field in Croatia. It encourages specialty hospital managers to prioritize service quality and customer satisfaction, especially when entering the health tourism market, to meet patient expectations and enhance competitiveness.

### ***Rational of the Study***

Customers' pivotal role in any business endeavor underscores the importance of conducting thorough research and analysis on them. Customer research is indispensable both before and after product sales. Customers exert a significant influence on an organization's business operations. A study by Lee and Madanoglu 2018 found that consistently satisfying customers results in higher customer retention rates and increased profitability. Similarly, another research conducted by Slack & Singh in 2020 emphasized that numerous companies have adopted a primary goal of continuously delighting customers to earn their loyalty and trust, ultimately driving more sales and profits.

Customers with a positive view of a specific brand tend to choose it consistently for their needs. Since many customers convey their satisfaction through their perceptions and attitudes, it is vital for product branding to capture their attention. Establishing a robust relationship with customers is essential to build customer loyalty. The most dependable approach to upholding a positive customer relationship is consistently delivering services that fulfill their requirements.

As most businesses strive to please their customers, the primary research focus is achieving customer satisfaction. This area necessitates ongoing research due to the ever-changing nature of customer needs, making customers the most unpredictable stakeholders in any business. Therefore, continuous research is vital to gauge their satisfaction levels, which can vary widely among individuals. Despite factors like price and product influencing customer satisfaction, this research primarily emphasizes service quality, widely recognized as the critical driver of satisfaction. Moreover, businesses commonly concentrate on improving



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their service quality to boost sales, underscoring the critical role of service quality in the study of custom.

### *Objective of the Study*

- To examine the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction.
- To investigate the various factors that impact customer satisfaction.
- To analyse the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

## **DISCUSSION**

The correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction has a profound impact on customer loyalty. It is observed that customer satisfaction plays a partial mediating role in the association between service quality and loyalty, suggesting that diminished service quality is linked to a decline in customer loyalty (Slack et al., 2020). The findings indicate a positive and statistically significant influence of both Service Value and Service Quality on customer satisfaction (Danish et al., 2018).

Reliability emerged as the foremost service quality dimension influencing customer satisfaction, followed by service empathy and tangibles. Responsiveness occupied the third position in terms of significance. Notably, the research findings also revealed that assurance held a relatively lesser importance in shaping customer satisfaction within the hotel industry (Bhuan, 2021). Client satisfaction is significantly linked to the five dimensions of service quality. Research results confirm a clear connection between client satisfaction and the five service quality dimensions: responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, reliability, and empathy.

According to a compilation of studies by Khan and Fasih (2014), Kaura et al. (2012), Naidoo (2010, 2014), Jayasundara et al. (2009), Aga and Safakli (2007), and Ismail et al. (2006), it is consistently affirmed that empathy, reliability, and assurance stand out as the predominant service quality dimensions significantly impacting customer satisfaction.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research aimed to identify the factors influencing customer satisfaction and establish a direct link between service quality and customer contentment. The strong correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction significantly influences customer loyalty. The findings indicate that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty, highlighting that a reduction in service quality is linked to a decrease in customer loyalty. Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that the five dimensions of service quality have varying degrees of impact on customer satisfaction. Reliability emerged as the most influential dimension, while empathy and tangibles had moderate effects. Responsiveness and assurance had the most negligible impact on customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that all five dimensions received substantial ratings.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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