

Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction in Online Food Delivery Services in Bharatpur

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in online food delivery (OFD) services in Bharatpur, Chitwan. It specifically examines how key service quality dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy influence customer satisfaction. Employing a descriptive research design and a quantitative approach, data were collected from one hundred and eighteen respondents who were above eighteen years through an online survey distributed via social media platforms.

Findings reveal that service quality dimensions significantly impact customer satisfaction, with notable emphasis on reliability and assurance. The study also highlights the growing importance of digital platforms and cloud kitchens in Nepal's evolving digital economy, especially in the post-Covid-19 context. The results suggest that improving service quality in areas such as delivery reliability, staff professionalism, and technological integration can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring additional variables and employing mixed-method approaches for deeper insights.

Keywords: *Customer satisfaction, online food delivery, reliability, responsiveness, service quality, tangibility*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world today is witnessing remarkable advancements in technology and innovation, with digital presence becoming an integral part of everyday life. According to a Statista survey, as of January 2021, 59.5 percent of the global population regularly used the Internet, with 92.6 percent of these users, or 4.32 billion individuals, accessing it through mobile devices. This technological growth has propelled the rapid expansion of e-commerce, including the food industry, which has shown steady progress over the years (Clement, 2019). As consumer behavior continues to shift towards online shopping, various aspects of service quality and customer satisfaction have been extensively explored in previous research.

Bharatpur, the fourth largest city in Nepal, serves as the administrative center of Chitwan District in Bagmati Province. Strategically positioned along the Narayani River, Bharatpur has emerged as a key commercial hub, with significant growth in healthcare, education, tourism, and retail sectors. The rapid urbanization of Bharatpur has led to significant lifestyle changes, increasing the demand for convenient services such as online food delivery. The proliferation of smartphones

and enhanced internet connectivity has further accelerated this trend, enabling residents to access a variety of services with ease.

Online food delivery services have become an essential component of modern dining experiences, offering customers convenience, variety, and time efficiency. In Bharatpur, Chitwan, the online food delivery sector has expanded considerably to cater to the evolving needs of consumers who seek quick and reliable meal options. The ability to order food with minimal effort has made these services popular among individuals with fast-paced lifestyles.

Service quality plays a crucial role in determining customer satisfaction in the online food delivery industry. Factors such as timely delivery, order accuracy, responsive customer service, and food quality significantly influence customers' overall experiences. Consumers expect seamless transactions, precise orders, effective support, and high-quality meals, all of which contribute to their satisfaction with the service.

Several online food delivery platforms, both national and local, have established a strong foothold in Bharatpur. These platforms collaborate with a wide array of restaurants, ranging from small local

eateries to high-end dining establishments, offering customers an extensive selection of food options. To maintain a competitive edge, online food delivery services in Bharatpur must prioritize key service quality aspects, including prompt delivery, order accuracy, and customer service excellence. Regular monitoring and improvements based on customer feedback are essential to sustaining high satisfaction levels among consumers.

Beyond individual satisfaction, online food delivery services have a broader economic and social impact on Bharatpur. These services create employment opportunities for delivery personnel and support staff, while also enabling local restaurants to expand their customer base and increase revenue. The convenience and variety offered by these platforms contribute to an improved quality of life for residents by saving time and effort in meal procurement.

In conclusion, the rise of online food delivery services in Bharatpur, Chitwan, reflects broader trends of urbanization, technological advancement, and changing consumer preferences. As these services continue to evolve, they are expected to play an increasingly important role in the daily lives of Bharatpur's residents, offering enhanced convenience, diverse

meal options, and a seamless dining experience.

The primary objective of this research is to examine how service quality influences customer satisfaction in online food delivery services in Bharatpur, Chitwan. Specifically, this study aims to explore the relationship between service quality dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance and customer satisfaction. Additionally, it seeks to assess how each of these dimensions individually contributes to the overall customer experience in Bharatpur's online food delivery sector. By analyzing these factors, the study aims to provide insights that can help businesses improve their services, enhance customer satisfaction, and foster customer loyalty in an increasingly competitive market.

2. RELATED WORKS

The rapid advancement of technology and innovation has significantly influenced various sectors, including e-commerce and online food delivery services. According to Kalyvaki (2023), the food industry has shown steady progress over the years due to the growth of e-commerce. A Statistical survey (2021) reported that as of January 2021, 59.5 percent of the global population regularly used the in this section we

compiled a comprehensive review of the literature related to the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in online food delivery (OFD) services. It discusses key theories, relevant dimensions of service quality, and previous studies examining the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The discussion is structured around the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) and the five independent variables: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a crucial element in business success and market growth (Tan & Kim, 2021). It is defined as an emotional or psychological response to a service experience, including product quality, service delivery, and overall expectations (Kumar, 2020). When customers experience high service quality—comprising tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—they are more likely to use the service again and exhibit brand loyalty (Yulistria et al., 2020).

From an e-service perspective, customer satisfaction significantly influences customer loyalty, as a high level of satisfaction encourages repeat purchases (Koay et al., 2022). In the context of OFD

services, customer satisfaction is closely linked to service quality. A positive service experience—such as timely deliveries, user-friendly applications, and professional customer service—enhances satisfaction and fosters long-term customer engagement (Koay et al., 2022).

Several studies suggest that customer satisfaction serves as a predictor of business success and consumer behavioral intentions (Ghosh, 2020). Measuring customer satisfaction is complex, especially as businesses expand into global markets (Kumar, 2020). According to Annaraud and Berezina (2020), customer satisfaction is determined by the gap between actual service experiences and customer expectations. Factors such as food availability, customer feedback, and secure payment options contribute to overall satisfaction. Service providers should prioritize service improvement over profit generation to enhance customer satisfaction (Ghosh, 2020).

Tangibility

Tangibility refers to the physical aspects of a service, including facilities, equipment, personnel, and presentation materials (Sahak et al., 2018). In the context of OFD services, tangibility extends to the aesthetics of mobile applications and websites, food packaging, and the

professional appearance of delivery personnel (Moon & Armstrong, 2020).

Previous studies indicate that tangible service attributes significantly influence customers' perception of service quality. Customers evaluate factors such as cleanliness, visual appeal, and ease of use when assessing service quality (Sahak et al., 2018). Online elements, such as website design, color schemes, and navigation features, also shape customer experiences (Moon & Armstrong, 2020).

However, some research suggests that tangibility has a negative impact on customer satisfaction when service providers fail to meet customer expectations (Sahak et al., 2018). Customers expect high standards in physical and digital service components, and a failure to deliver may result in dissatisfaction. To bridge this gap, OFD service providers must enhance website functionality, improve app design, and maintain high-quality packaging standards.

Reliability

Reliability refers to a service provider's ability to perform services dependably and accurately (Koay et al., 2022). It is a critical determinant of customer trust and satisfaction, particularly in the OFD industry, where timely and accurate

deliveries are essential. Reliability encompasses several factors, including product presentation, product availability, and ease of ordering through online platforms (Verma, 2020). A service provider's responsiveness to complaints, consistency in service quality, and ability to fulfill promises significantly influence customer satisfaction (Sahak et al., 2018). Research indicates a strong positive correlation between reliability and customer satisfaction in the service industry (Koay et al., 2022). In OFD services, reliability is often evaluated based on the punctuality of deliveries, food freshness, and the accuracy of orders (Nguyen et al., 2023). Since food delivery involves perishable items, companies must operate within defined service radii to ensure timely and quality deliveries (Will, 2021). Moreover, delivery personnel play a crucial role in service reliability. Customers are more satisfied when delivery staff exhibit professionalism and maintain effective communication during transactions (Yusra & Agus, 2020).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness measures a service provider's ability to react promptly and efficiently to customer needs (Sahak et al., 2018). It includes aspects such as customer service response time,

complaint resolution, and the ability to provide necessary service adjustments (Kobiruzzaman, 2020). A company's responsiveness significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty (Ramya et al., 2019). To enhance responsiveness, companies must monitor service delivery processes and ensure employees exhibit positive attitudes toward customer requests. Excessive reliance on automated systems, without human intervention, may negatively affect customer satisfaction (Sinha et al., 2022). Studies indicate that responsiveness has a strong positive correlation with customer satisfaction (Yusra & Agus, 2020). Customers expect timely resolutions to service failures, such as missing or incorrect orders. When companies fail to respond effectively, dissatisfied customers may share negative reviews, potentially damaging the brand's reputation (Yusra & Agus, 2020).

Assurance

Assurance refers to a service provider's ability to build customer confidence through employee knowledge, professionalism, and ethical behavior (Balinado, 2021). It involves elements such as secure transactions, clear service instructions, and the courteous behavior of staff. In the OFD industry, assurance is closely linked to trust. Customers expect

their food to be handled safely, their personal information to be secure, and their service requests to be respected (Spears et al., 2013). Assurance also includes aspects such as customer support agents providing accurate information, professional conduct of delivery personnel, and secure payment gateways (Sahak, 2018). A high level of assurance fosters customer trust, which in turn enhances satisfaction and loyalty. Customers are more likely to repurchase from platforms they trust, making assurance a critical component of service quality.

Empathy

Empathy refers to the level of personalized attention and care provided to customers (Ramya et al., 2019). It includes understanding customer needs, offering convenient service options, and addressing customer concerns with compassion (Sahak et al., 2018). Personalized services help create emotional connections with customers, making them feel valued and appreciated (Kobiruzzaman, 2020). A lack of empathy in service delivery can lead to customer dissatisfaction and potential customer churn. Companies must train employees to demonstrate compassion, actively listen to customer concerns, and provide individualized support (Sparks, 2021). Studies suggest that empathy has

a direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Companies that invest in personalized customer interactions tend to experience higher customer retention rates (Sparks, 2021). However, research by Banerjee et al. (2019) indicates that empathy ranks second in service quality dimensions affecting customer satisfaction in the OFD industry. Customers may expect higher levels of empathy than what is currently offered, leading to gaps in service quality perception. To address this, OFD companies must focus on developing strong customer relationships and enhancing personalized service experiences (Banerjee et al., 2019).

This review of literature highlights the significant role of service quality dimensions in influencing customer satisfaction in OFD services. Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy collectively shape customer experiences and determine satisfaction levels. While each dimension has a unique impact, responsiveness and reliability appear to have the strongest correlation with customer satisfaction. To remain competitive, OFD service providers must continuously improve their service quality to meet evolving customer expectations.

3. METHODS

3.1 Study design and population

This study employs a descriptive research design to analyze the current state and characteristics of the population regarding the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in online food delivery (OFD) services in Bharatpur. The study utilizes a quantitative research approach, gathering data through an online survey to examine the relationship between service quality factors and customer satisfaction. The survey was structured with independent and dependent variables to construct a comprehensive questionnaire.

The target population for this study includes individuals above 18 years old residing in Bharatpur. The selection of this population is based on their familiarity with online food delivery services and digital technology. As they actively use online food ordering platforms, they are well-suited to provide relevant insights into the factors influencing their satisfaction with OFD services.

3.2 Method of data collection and analysis

This research primarily relies on primary data collection through an online questionnaire. Given the growing use of online surveys and technological advancements, the questionnaire was

distributed via Google Forms through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The survey targeted OFD users in Bharatpur, ensuring respondents were of legal age and had purchasing power to engage in online food ordering.

A structured questionnaire was designed to collect data for this study. The questionnaire was prepared in English and divided into three sections: Section A was for demographic profile, including age, gender, and family income, utilizing a closed-ended format, where as Section B includes factors of service quality, covering tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, which influence customer satisfaction in OFD services, and Section C is for customer satisfaction, which represents the dependent variable and measures users' overall experience with OFD services.

3.3 Theoretical background

In examining the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction within Bharatpur's online food delivery services, the theoretical framework is anchored in the SERVQUAL model, a widely recognized instrument for assessing service quality across various industries. This model delineates five critical dimensions: tangibility, reliability,

responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, which collectively encapsulate the core facets of service quality. Tangibility pertains to the physical evidence of the service, such as the appearance of facilities and personnel; reliability involves the accurate and dependable performance of promised services; responsiveness reflects the willingness to assist customers promptly; assurance encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees, fostering trust and confidence; and empathy denotes the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers. By applying the SERVQUAL framework, this study aims to elucidate how these dimensions influence customer satisfaction in the context of Bharatpur's online food delivery sector, thereby offering insights into areas necessitating enhancement to bolster customer contentment.

4. RESULTS

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study reflects a predominantly young, student-based population with limited income levels, which aligns with the broader objective of assessing online food delivery usage among emerging digital consumers in Bharatpur, Chitwan. Among the 118 participants, the majority (82.2%) were between the ages of 18 and

25, while a small proportion were below 18 (3.4%), aged 26–35 (10.2%), or above 35 (4.2%). In terms of gender, 56.8% of respondents were female and 43.2% were male, suggesting a slightly higher female representation in the sample. Regarding monthly income, a significant proportion of respondents (42.4%) reported no personal income, likely due to their student status, while 16.9% earned below Rs. 10,000, and smaller percentages fell

within other income brackets. Only 14.4% reported earning more than Rs. 40,000 per month. Occupationally, the largest group of respondents (69.5%) identified as students, followed by employed individuals (15.3%), self-employed individuals (10.2%), and others (5.1%).

In terms of delivery speed and reliability, a significant majority of respondents (52.7%) reported being satisfied, indicating a generally positive perception

Table 1: Demographics of respondents

Demographics	Respondents	Percentage
Age		
Below 18	4	3.4%
18-25	97	82.2%
26-35	12	10.2%
Above 35	5	4.2%
Gender		
Male	51	43.2%
Female	67	56.8%
Income		
Below Rs10,000	20	16.9%
Rs10,000-Rs20,000	16	13.6%
Rs20,000-Rs30,000	10	8.5%
Rs30,000-Rs40,000	5	4.2%
Above 40,000	17	14.4%
None	50	42.4%
Occupation		
Student	82	69.5%
Employed	18	15.3%
Self-Employed	12	10.2%
Other	6	5.1%

Table 2: Responses of respondents for different perspectives

	Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Speed and reliability of order deliveries	Very Dissatisfied	3	2.5%
	Dissatisfied	18	15.3%
	Neutral	23	19.5%
	Satisfied	74	52.7%
Personalized, do you feel the service	Very Impersonal	40	33.9%
	Impersonal	27	22.9%
	Neutral	4	3.4%
	Personalized	47	39.8%

of operational efficiency. A smaller segment expressed dissatisfaction, with 15.3% dissatisfied and only 2.5% very dissatisfied, while 19.5% remained neutral. These results suggest that, for most users, timely and reliable service is a strength of online food delivery platforms in the study area.

Conversely, responses regarding the personalization of service were more mixed. While 39.8% of participants felt that the service was personalized, a considerable proportion perceived it as impersonal (22.9%) or very impersonal (33.9%). Only 3.4% held a neutral view. This highlights a potential

Table 3: Responses of respondents for different perspectives

Perception	Opinion	Respondents	Percentage
Rate the value of money of the food delivery service	Never	14	11.9%
	Poor	6	5.1%
	Average	71	60.2%
	Good	37	31.4%
	Excellent	4	3.4%
Recommend the online food delivery service to others	Unlikely	3	2.5%
	Neutral	33	28.0%
	Likely	73	61.9%
	Very Likely	9	7.6%
How satisfied are you with the service quality of the online food delivery service you use	Dissatisfied	2	1.7%
	Neutral	46	39.0%
	Satisfied	65	55.1%
	Very Satisfied	5	4.2%

area for improvement, suggesting that while operational performance may be satisfactory, the user experience could be enhanced through more tailored and customer-centric service interactions (see Table 2).

When asked to rate the value for money, a majority of respondents (60.2%) rated it as “Average,” followed by 31.4% who considered it “Good.” A smaller portion expressed negative views, with 11.9%

indicating they would “Never” consider it valuable and 5.1% rating it as “Poor.” Only 3.4% of the respondents rated the service as “Excellent.” These findings suggest that while most users find the service moderately satisfactory in terms of value, there is room for improvement in delivering greater perceived worth. Regarding satisfaction with service quality, 55.1% of the respondents reported being “Satisfied,” and 4.2% were “Very Satisfied,” reflecting a generally positive

Table 4: Satisfaction level of customers for online food catering services

Satisfaction on	Satisfaction level	Number of respondents	Percent
Range of food options catering	Dissatisfied	1	0.8 %
	Neutral	46	39.0 %
	Satisfied	70	59.3 %
	Very Satisfied	1	0.8 %
Consistency of the food order received	Dissatisfied	3	2.5 %
	Neutral	56	47.5 %
	Satisfied	55	46.6 %
	Very Satisfied	4	3.4 %
Behavior and professionalism of delivery personnel	Dissatisfied	1	0.8 %
	Neutral	23	19.5 %
	Satisfied	88	74.6 %
	Very Satisfied	6	5.1 %
Packaging quality of your orders	Poor	1	0.8 %
	Average	39	33.1 %
	Good	70	59.3 %
	Excellent	8	6.8 %
Hygiene and satisfy measures by the food delivery service	Dissatisfied	1	0.8 %
	Neutral	53	44.9 %
	Satisfied	59	50.0 %
	Very Satisfied	5	4.2 %

perception of service delivery. However, 39.0% maintained a “Neutral” stance, and a small proportion were “Dissatisfied” (1.7%) or “Unlikely” to recommend the service (2.5%). This highlights that while over half of the users are content with the service, a considerable number remain indifferent, pointing to a need for enhancing customer experience to foster stronger brand advocacy (see Table 3).

A majority of respondents (59.3%) reported being “Satisfied” with the range of food options, while 39.0% were “Neutral,” indicating moderate contentment, with very few expressing dissatisfaction or high satisfaction. In terms of food order consistency, opinions were nearly evenly split between “Neutral” (47.5%) and “Satisfied” (46.6%), with minimal dissatisfaction, suggesting relatively stable performance but potential for improvement. Notably, satisfaction with the behavior and professionalism of delivery personnel was overwhelmingly positive, with 74.6% “Satisfied” and an additional 5.1% “Very Satisfied,” reflecting strong service in this area. Packaging quality was also rated favorably, with 59.3% marking it as “Good” and 6.8% as “Excellent,” although 33.1% considered it only “Average,” signaling moderate scope for enhancement. Hygiene and safety measures received a positive response

from half the respondents (50.0% “Satisfied” and 4.2% “Very Satisfied”), though 44.9% remained “Neutral.” This suggests that while hygiene standards are generally acceptable, clearer or more visible hygiene practices might help in improving customer perception (see Table4). The findings indicate that delivery personnel professionalism and food packaging are the strongest aspects, whereas consistency, hygiene, and variety, though rated positively, could benefit from targeted improvements to further enhance customer satisfaction.

5. DISCUSSION

The significant growth of online media and internet usage has greatly influenced the rise of online food delivery services, particularly in Bharatpur, Chitwan. The convenience and ease of online ordering, along with integrated payment options, have reshaped consumer behavior, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led many businesses to adopt delivery-centric strategies. Customer satisfaction in online food delivery is crucial, as it directly impacts customer loyalty and business success. This study identified key factors influencing customer satisfaction, including price, food quality, customer service, technology and

innovation, and delivery service. These variables were found to play a pivotal role in shaping the overall satisfaction of consumers. The simplicity of online food ordering, combined with the lack of need for physical dining spaces, positions cloud kitchens as an effective business model in Nepal's emerging digital economy. Although digitalization and ICT adoption are still developing in Nepal, this study highlights how cloud kitchens contribute to the growth of the digital economy by meeting consumer demands for convenience and reliability. Further research could explore additional factors affecting satisfaction and investigate how these businesses can adapt to the evolving digital landscape.

5.1 Limitation

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. Data collection was conducted through an online Google Form, which posed challenges in response accuracy and completeness, as some participants either did not fully complete the questionnaire or declined to participate altogether. Moreover, the study focused only on five independent variables: reliability, responsiveness, assertiveness, empathy, and assurance, limiting the scope for examining other potentially influential factors. With these limitations,

this research could benefit from employing a mixed-methods approach and broader variable inclusion to enhance depth and reliability.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors influencing customer satisfaction with online food delivery services in Bharatpur, Chitwan, using a causal-comparative design and descriptive analysis. Based on responses from 118 participants, primarily female students aged 18–25 with modest incomes, the findings reveal that variables such as tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy significantly affect customer satisfaction. Notably, customers expressed high satisfaction with aspects like food quality, freshness, and technological ease. However, customer service and responsiveness had minimal influence on purchase frequency and satisfaction. Overall, while online food delivery is still used infrequently, its convenience and evolving digital infrastructure make it a promising area for continued business growth and innovation.

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