

Assessing Customer Satisfaction in Food Cafes: A Case Study of Birgunj Metropolis

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Abstract

Birgunj is situated at southern part of Madhesh Province of Nepal. The nearby International border is Raxaul from Bihar State of India. Birgunj has cultural verities. The area is educational hub also which leads to a huge number of youths. Officers, students and youngsters tend to visit café and restaurant at celebration and leisure time. This study aims to find out the customer satisfaction level in food café regarding service quality, food taste, pricing, hygiene, and ambiance. This study aims to recommend appropriate suggestions to the restaurant and café owners to enhance customer satisfaction and business growth. The researcher has used mixed method and data have been collected by interviews, Likert 5-point scale method. Secondary information are taken from various journals, newspaper articles, books. Findings reveal high customer satisfaction with staff politeness, mobile payment options, free Wi-Fi, and digital menus. Moderate satisfaction was noted in food quality, cleanliness, ambiance, and interior design, while pricing, queue management, and smoking/family area separation scored lower. The study concludes that while digital services and staff behavior drive high satisfaction, improvements in pricing, space management, and service efficiency are essential to enhance the overall customer experience in Birgunj cafés.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, food café, service quality, digital services, pricing and interior

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Introduction

This study aims to assess customer satisfaction in Birgunj Metropolis, located in the southern part of Nepal near the Raxaul border of India. Customer satisfaction has become a crucial metric for evaluating the success and sustainability of businesses, particularly within the food and hospitality sectors (Mishra & Mishra, 2024a). In urban centers like Birgunj Metropolis, situated in Madhesh Province, food cafes, tea shops, and lunch

centers have expanded rapidly in recent years. Despite this growth, many of these establishments continue to operate at an average level regarding customer satisfaction and overall business performance (Mishra, 2024).

Understanding key factors valued by customers—such as food quality, pricing, hygiene, ambiance, and service experience—is essential for improving business standards (Mishra & Mishra, 2024a). Customer satisfaction surveys serve as



valuable tools that provide actionable insights, enabling food cafes to tailor their services to meet customer expectations and foster long-term loyalty. This study employed a structured questionnaire based on a Likert 5-point scale to collect quantitative data on satisfaction levels across various cafes in Birgunj.

The sample comprised a heterogeneous group of respondents, enhancing the representativeness of the results. Among the participants, 66.7% were male and 33.3% female. Regarding age distribution, 50% were between 21 and 30 years, 33.3% were over 30 years, and 16.7% were under 20 years. Professionally, respondents included university students (25%), banking/private/insurance employees (25%), business professionals (19.9%), school/high school students (16%), and government employees (14.1%) (Mishra & Mishra, 2024b). This demographic diversity provides a comprehensive perspective on customer attitudes within the Birgunj food service sector.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate customer satisfaction in food cafes within Birgunj Metropolis and to identify key determinants influencing customer perceptions and preferences. The findings aim to assist local cafe owners and stakeholders in making informed decisions to enhance service quality and improve customer experiences.

Birgunj, known as the industrial gateway to Nepal, is located in Parsa District of Madhesh Province, roughly 135 km south of Kathmandu and adjacent to Raxaul in Bihar, India. Established as a municipality during the premiership of Mohan Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana, it was declared a Metropolitan City in 2017 alongside Biratnagar and Pokhara. As one of Nepal's largest cities and the most populous in Madhesh Province, Birgunj ranks as the fifth most populous metropolitan area nationally, with a population of 268,273 (National Statistics Office, 2021). The city plays a central role in Nepal's import-export and industrial sectors and is the only metropolitan city within Madhesh Province (Mishra & Mishra, 2024b).

Problem Statement

The rapid proliferation of tea shops, lunch centers, and food cafes in Birgunj Metropolis, a significant commercial center in Nepal's Madhesh Province, signals growing demand for food and beverage services. However, despite this expansion, many cafes continue to exhibit average performance with limited customer retention and satisfaction. Notably, only a few establishments—primarily those supported by substantial investments—consistently provide satisfactory service quality. This uneven service delivery raises critical concerns about the overall customer experience in Birgunj's food service sector. Moreover, customer preferences and expectations remain inadequately understood, as few empirical studies have systematically examined the key factors driving satisfaction in this local context. Elements such as service speed, pricing fairness, hygiene, staff conduct, ambiance, and technological adoption (e.g., mobile payments and online ordering) significantly influence customer perceptions, yet cafe owners often operate based on assumptions rather than empirical evidence. This gap in knowledge hinders the development of effective strategies aimed at improving customer satisfaction and business performance in the city's competitive food cafe market (Mishra & Mishra, 2024b).

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to assess customer satisfaction levels in tea shops, lunch centers, and food cafes operating within Birgunj Metropolis to identify key factors influencing satisfaction and to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing service quality and competitiveness.

Literature Review

Customer satisfaction in food cafes has become an essential indicator of business success, particularly in urban commercial hubs like Birgunj Metropolis in Nepal. This review synthesizes research from diverse sources to elucidate the factors shaping customer satisfaction and the

implications for food cafes operating in growing markets.

Birgunj, as a major industrial and commercial center in Madhesh Province, Nepal, reflects an evolving food service sector characterized by rapid expansion of tea shops, lunch centers, and cafes. Despite this growth, challenges persist such as uneven service quality, limited customer loyalty, and a lack of data-driven improvement strategies. The current economic and regulatory environment in Nepal, including tax policies and trade restrictions, further complicates the operational landscape for local businesses (Ministry of Finance, 2021).

Service quality is widely acknowledged as a primary driver of customer satisfaction in the hospitality domain. Ali et al. (2021) emphasize that consistent delivery across dimensions such as responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy significantly enhances satisfaction levels. Similarly, Rasaily et al. (2023) identify service quality as foundational for customer repurchase intention in Kathmandu's cafes, underscoring parallels across Nepalese urban contexts.

Food quality, alongside service quality, remains pivotal in shaping diners' evaluations. Namkung and Jang (2007, 2008) demonstrate that perceived food quality strongly influences customer satisfaction and subsequent behavioral intentions, including loyalty and word-of-mouth. These findings concur with Arlanda et al. (2018) research, which links food and beverage quality, place ambiance, and perceived price fairness to satisfaction outcomes.

Pricing fairness emerges as another important factor affecting consumer perception. Customers evaluate the price in relation to the quality of food and service, with perceived value influencing satisfaction (Oh, 2000). In competitive markets such as Birgunj, where cafes vary from small-scale to highly invested establishments, price perception may contribute to the observed disparities in satisfaction and customer retention (Mishra & Mishra, 2024a).

Hygiene and ambiance are also frequently cited determinants. Mahato and Goet (2020) found strong correlations between food safety standards and customer loyalty in Nepal's restaurant industry. Aspects of staff behavior and atmosphere significantly shape the dining experience, influencing overall satisfaction (Gupta et al., 2007).

The adoption of technology, including mobile payments and online ordering, is a contemporary dimension increasingly affecting customer expectations. However, many cafes in transitional markets like Birgunj lack systematic data collection or technological integration, leading to a dependence on assumptions in managerial decision-making (Karn, 2025). This gap signals an urgent need for empirical research to identify customer preferences reliably.

Survey methodologies using Likert scale instruments are commonly employed to quantify satisfaction levels and assess service attributes. As Tanujaya et al. (2023) note, while Likert scales offer structured responses, researchers must cautiously interpret findings considering possible response biases and scale limitations.

From an economic and sociological perspective, cross-border trade and open-border dynamics notably influence business performance and consumer behavior in the region. Paudel and Devkota (2018) discern that socio-economic variables, including education and income, affect small business outcomes, indirectly impacting customer satisfaction patterns. Karn's (2024, 2025) studies on emotional intelligence and cultural philosophies provide additional context, suggesting that employee well-being and cultural attitudes can mitigate stress and improve service delivery in the hospitality sector.

Finally, classical models of satisfaction measurement (Oliver, 1981, 1999) continue to underpin research frameworks, advocating a cognitive approach to understanding antecedents and consequences of satisfaction. Integrating these theoretical models with localized empirical data promises enhanced strategic insights for food

cafes seeking market differentiation in Birgunj and similar urban settings.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively assess customer satisfaction in food cafes within Birgunj Metropolis. The quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires with Likert 5-point scale items, while qualitative insights were gathered through open-ended responses and informal interviews with selected participants. This combination allowed for both statistical analysis and a deeper understanding of customer experiences. The target population included customers who frequently visit tea shops, lunch centers, and food cafes in various locations across Birgunj. A set of questionnaire were developed

and distributed to the respondents through google forms. A total of 172 respondents participated in the study, representing a diverse mix in terms of gender, age, and profession. Literature review of books, scholarly journals, reports, and digital content on Customer satisfaction and café-restaurant business was exhaustively conducted. This provided the theoretical foundation and contextual history of the study. The research conducted a market survey based on Likert 5-point scale method and the data were collected through Google forms and individual interview.

Results and Discussion

The study in Birgunj cafés shows high satisfaction with staff and digital services, moderate satisfaction with food and ambiance, and lower satisfaction with pricing and space management, highlighting key areas for improvement.

Table 1

The Calculation of Total Respondents

Gender	Participation
Male	66.70%
Female	33.30%

Note. Author's calculation

Table 2

The Calculation of Respondent Age-wise

Age	Participation
15 Years and below 20 years	16.70%
21 Years and below 30 years	50%
Above 30 Years	33.30%

Note. Author's calculation

Table 3

The Calculation of Respondent Profession-wise

Profession	Participation
School/high school students	16%
Government job holder	14.10%
Banker/insurance job/private job holder	25%
Business	19.90%
University student	25%

Note. Author's calculation

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics of Survey Statements (Mean and Median)*

Statement	Mean	Median
The food is tasty, fresh, and well-presented.	3.8	4.0
The quality of the food is consistent.	3.7	4.0
The café offers a good variety of menu options.	3.4	4.0
Staff are polite and well-behaved.	4.3	4.0
Service is quick and efficient.	3.7	4.0
Staff are knowledgeable and helpful.	3.9	4.0
The cafe is clean and hygienic (dining area, kitchen, restrooms).	3.8	4.0
Proper food safety practices are followed.	3.5	4.0
The interior, seating, and lighting create a pleasant environment.	4.0	4.0
The cafe maintains an appropriate noise level.	3.8	4.0
The atmosphere is comfortable for dining.	4.0	4.0
Prices are fair compared to food quality and quantity.	3.1	4.0
Parking or public transport is easily available.	3.4	4.0
The cafe meets or exceeds my expectations.	3.6	4.0
Online ordering or digital menus are available.	4.1	4.0
Mobile payment options are available.	4.3	4.0
Free Wi-Fi is provided.	4.2	4.0
Food is served in a timely manner.	3.7	4.0
Queue management is efficient, even during peak hours.	3.1	3.0
Smoking and family area are separated	3.3	4.0

Note. Author's calculation**Table 5***Descriptive Statistics: Positive Correlation of Each Survey Statement*

Items	Correlation	Insight
Interior, seating, lighting & Comfortable atmosphere	0.79	Design elements directly enhance dining comfort.
Queue management & Food served timely	0.78	Efficient queues lead to faster service.
Clean & hygienic café & Service is quick and efficient	0.75	Clean environments often reflect better service efficiency.
Smoking/family area separation & Queue management	0.81	Structure and order in one area is linked to better crowd management.
Fair pricing & Smoking/family area separation	0.74	Perception of fairness might improve when there's clear spatial organization.

Note. Key strong positive correlation $r>0.7$, Author's calculation

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics: Negative Correlation of Each Survey Statement*

Items	Correlation	Insight
Mobile payment & Food is served timely	-0.64	Digital services may not be linked with quicker food delivery.
Online ordering & Food is served timely	-0.7	Possibly due to delayed online processing during peak hours.
Fair pricing & Online ordering	-0.56	Customers might associate online ordering with hidden/additional costs.
Polite staff & Fair pricing	-0.53	An unexpected inverse relationship that could suggest bias or isolated dissatisfaction.

Note. Key weak or negative correlations $r < 0.1$, Author's calculation

Table 7*Category-wise Survey Statements*

S.N.	Category	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Food Quality	The food is tasty, fresh, and well-presented.					
		The quality of the food is consistent.					
		The café offers a good variety of menu options.					
2.	Service Quality	Staff are polite and well-behaved.					
		Service is quick and efficient.					
		Staff are knowledgeable and helpful.					
3.	Hygiene and Cleanliness	Café Cleanliness & Hygiene					
		Proper food safety practices are followed.					
4.	Ambience and Environment	Pleasant Interior & Ambience					
		The café maintains an appropriate noise level.					
		The atmosphere is comfortable for dining.					
		Smoking and family area are separated					
5.	Pricing and Value for Money	Prices are fair compared to food quality and quantity.					
6.	Location and Accessibility	Parking or public transport is easily available.					
7.	Expectations vs. Experience	The café meets or exceeds my expectations.					
8.	Technology and Convenience	Online ordering or digital menus are available.					
		Mobile payment options are available.					
		Free Wi-Fi is provided.					
9	Waiting Time	Food is served in a timely manner.					
		Queue management is efficient, even during peak hours.					

The survey responses as shown annex 1 of table 7 were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and median), and correlation analysis to assess customer satisfaction across various aspects of food cafes in Birgunj. Key findings include:

- o High satisfaction was observed in areas such as staff politeness (mean: 4.3), availability of mobile payment options (mean: 4.3), free Wi-Fi (mean: 4.2), and online/digital menu options (mean: 4.1).
- o Factors like food taste and freshness (mean: 3.8), café cleanliness (mean: 3.8), comfortable atmosphere (mean: 4.0), and interior design (mean: 4.0) also received positive ratings.
- o Lower satisfaction was reported in pricing (mean: 3.1), queue management (mean: 3.1), and separation of smoking/family areas (mean: 3.3).
- o Correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships ($r > 0.7$) between:
 - Interior and atmosphere with dining comfort ($r = 0.79$)
 - serving timeliness ($r = 0.78$)
 - Cleanliness Queue management and food
 - and service efficiency ($r = 0.75$)
- o On the contrary, negative correlations were identified between:
 - Online ordering and timely food service ($r = -0.70$)
 - Mobile payment and food delivery time ($r = -0.64$)
 - Fair pricing and online ordering ($r = -0.56$)

Discussion

The findings highlight that while most customers are satisfied with service quality, ambiance, and technological conveniences such as mobile payments and Wi-Fi, there are notable areas for improvement. The high mean and median scores across most items indicate that overall service meets customer expectations. A proper

list of statement were developed as mentioned in table-7 to get data from the respondents. Interview was also taken to gather some specific information to justify good findings from the research.

Positive correlations suggest that physical environment and operational efficiency (e.g., queue management, hygiene, seating comfort) are directly linked to higher customer satisfaction. Cafes that maintain pleasant interiors and hygienic standards also tend to serve food more efficiently and manage customer flow better.

Negative correlations, however, raise interesting observations. For example, the use of online services (ordering, payment) is not necessarily associated with faster service, particularly during peak hours. This indicates a need to strengthen backend operations for digital services. Additionally, the unexpected negative link between staff politeness and fair pricing may reflect subjective perceptions where higher-end service is associated with premium pricing, which some customers may find unjustified.

These results underline the importance of not only improving physical and service quality but also addressing customer perceptions regarding price fairness and digital convenience.

Conclusion

This study assessed customer satisfaction in food cafes within Birgunj Metropolis using a mixed-method approach, integrating both Likert scale-based quantitative data and qualitative insights. The results show a generally high level of satisfaction among respondents, especially in terms of service behavior, ambiance, and digital features. However, areas such as pricing, queue management, and clarity in space organization (e.g., non-smoking/family zones) require significant attention. Most of the items bear high cost inside restaurants and cafe comparatively fast-food zones. Such pricing factor should be considered seriously to increase flow of customers.

The strong correlations between environment and customer comfort emphasize the need

for aesthetic and functional interior planning. Conversely, the negative relationships between online services and timely delivery point to an operational gap in digital service management.

Recommendations

The study recommends that café operators:

- o Improve queue systems and customer flow management.
- o Reevaluate pricing strategies to align perceived value with actual service.
- o Optimize digital ordering and payment systems for peak hours.
- o Maintain clear distinctions between smoking and family-friendly zones.

By addressing these areas, food cafes in Birgunj can enhance customer experiences, build loyalty, and achieve better business performance.

Based on the analysis of customer feedback and correlation results, the following recommendations are proposed to improve service quality and customer satisfaction in food cafes across Birgunj:

1. Improve Queue and Order Management

- o Implement token systems or digital queue displays, especially during peak hours.
- o Allocate more staff to handle rush periods efficiently to reduce waiting time.

2. Strengthen Digital Service Efficiency

- o Optimize online ordering and mobile payment systems to ensure speed and accuracy.
- o Train staff to manage online and offline orders simultaneously without delays.

3. Enhance Pricing Strategy

- o Reevaluate pricing structures to reflect a balance between affordability and food quality.
- o Introduce combo meals, discounts for loyal customers, or student specials to increase value perception.

4. Upgrade Café Ambience and Design

- o Focus on maintaining a clean, well-lit, and comfortable dining environment.
- o Regularly refresh interior design to keep the space modern and appealing.
- 5. Ensure Hygiene and Safety Compliance
- o Conduct regular inspections of the kitchen, restrooms, and dining area.
- o Train staff on food safety standards and personal hygiene practices.

6. Separate Smoking and Family Areas

- o Designate separate sections for smokers and non-smokers/families to create a more inclusive and comfortable environment.

7. Focus on Staff Training and Attitude

- o Provide regular customer service training to maintain politeness, helpfulness, and professionalism.
- o Encourage staff to actively engage with customer feedback for continuous improvement.

8. Leverage Customer Feedback Mechanisms

- o Use short digital surveys or feedback kiosks to collect real-time responses from customers.
- o Actively review and act on suggestions or complaints to build trust and satisfaction.

9. Promote Technological Integration

- o Introduce features such as digital menus, QR code-based ordering, and mobile app loyalty programs to enhance customer experience.

10. Target Diverse Customer Segments

Tailor services and offers to meet the needs of different customer groups, such as students, working professionals, and families.

11. Food safety guidelines

Food safety guidelines should be followed as prescribed by government regulators.

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