



Homestay Service Quality for Developing Rural Tourism: A Comparative Study between Private and Community Homestays

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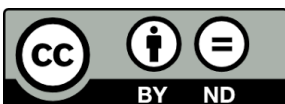
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Abstract

Private and community homestays are essential to rural tourism. Nevertheless, empirical research on private homestays remains limited. This study aims to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of two types of homestays and determine the most appropriate model for supporting rural tourism development. The study encompasses interviews with customers of private and community homestays. The qualitative findings reveal that both homestays have special features, each with specific advantages and disadvantages. The community homestay exceeds the private homestay in terms of service quality. This research examines both categories of homestays, while previous studies have centred on community homestays. This empirical study assists rural homestay management organisations in enhancing the quality of homestay services.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Community homestay, Private homestay, Service quality

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INTRODUCTION

People's daily routines may be stressful, which is why they actively pursue irregular schedules in new and unexplored locations and become tourists (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Todorovic & Jovicic, 2016; Dhungana & Sharma, 2024). People pursue unique and novel experiences for relaxation, seeking to escape the stress of daily life (Rahmawati et al., 2022; Dhungana & Sharma, 2024). On the other hand, people wanted to escape from the crowded city, try something new, relax, and enjoy a sense of freedom (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Demirovic et al., 2019). After the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of rural tourism increased, and rurality gave rise to proximity tourism (Cheer, 2024). Under this trend, the demands of rural areas generate a broader tourism market (Demirovic et al., 2019; Pujiastuti, 2020; Ghimire, 2023). Rural tourism offers a genuine opportunity to revitalise the local community by enhancing the local environment and preserving its cultural and historical elements (Daniloska & Mihajlovska, 2015; Yanan, 2024). In rural areas, there is a growing interest in homestays as a form of accommodation (Samsudin & Maliki, 2015; Osman et al., 2023; Regmi et al., 2023). In other words, the role of homestays as an alternative accommodation option promotes sustainable rural tourism (Zhou et al., 2022; Chhatterjee et al., 2024; Nurfadilah et al., 2024). Furthermore, the homestay's attributes are better suited to a rural environment than to an urban one.

Homestays have some basic characteristics, such as a familiar environment, a lack of hotels and guest houses. A familiar environment is an extremely important feature of the homestay (Dhakal et al., 2020). Homestays offer a 'home away from home' experience for a fee, providing supplementary accommodation and promoting rural tourism (Chhatterjee et al., 2024). The homestay's service quality is enhanced by the fact that the core of the experience is the familiar environment and firsthand cultural immersion (Ismail et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2023). It means that increased

communication between guests and host families in homestays results in higher-quality service for guests. Typically, communities operate and own homestays to offer tourists the opportunity to gain insight into the local population's lifestyle (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Ismail et al., 2016; Bhuiyan, 2019; Rahayu et al., 2023; Nurfadilah, 2024). Consequently, community homestays can promote local culture by harnessing collective community efforts.

According to the National Statistics of Nepal (2019), Nepal has 245 formally registered communities' homestays and 79 private homestays. Nevertheless, the number is significantly higher because the record does not include several hundred subsequent homestays. It is undeniable that both types of homestays are influenced by local culture and utilise local resources. However, the operating systems differ between homestays. The community directly owns community homestays, while the host family directly owns private homestays. The entire community fully supported the community homestay, while the private homestay was partially supported. This disparity in support affected the quality of the homestay services.

Currently, a lot of research has focused on community-based homestays regarding service quality (Ismail et al., 2016; Wahid et al., 2017; Bhuiyan, 2019; Zijing & Pu, 2020; Laymoun et al., 2020; Petakovic et al., 2022; Voon et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023; Ghani et al., 2024; Sroyetch et al., 2025). The quality of private homestay services is less well-known than that of community homestays. If a community owns the homestay, the service is significantly shaped by the community's culture. Conversely, if a host family owns the homestay, the service is slightly less influenced by community culture than in a community homestay. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the characteristics of both types of homestays to enhance service quality. There has been a lack of research that investigates the service quality of both types of homestays.

Unfortunately, previous research has only focused on community homestays and has not considered private homestays. In addition, there is a lack of comparative analysis of homestay operating systems. To address this research gap, this study compares the characteristics of the two types of homestays and identifies their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this study is to identify suitable homestays for the development of rural tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural tourism

Tourists' presence in rural natural and local environments, and their enjoyment and experience of these settings, define rural tourism. Yanan et al. (2024) conduct a literature review that suggests rural tourism has the potential to enhance residents' well-being. This potential requires the consideration of various stakeholders and the preservation of the unique characteristics of traditional villages. Rural tourism will undoubtedly contribute to achieving a balanced rural society and sustainable development (Ohe, 2008; Daniloska & Mihajlovska, 2015; Chhatterjee et al., 2024). Every rural area is unique in its tourism development, and the rural population creates valuable tourist products to support sustainable development (Daniloska & Mihajlovska, 2015). Therefore, rural areas are provided with economic and social opportunities. Rural tourism endeavours to revitalise rural resources for the benefit of local socio-economic communities and environmental sustainability by actively engaging and empowering local communities (Rosalina et al., 2021).

Rural tourism covers traditions, customs, and local identity (Amaral, 2019). Wu and Yang (2023) studied online reviews and found that the natural environment, affordable pricing, food quality, hospitality, and cultural heritage are essential service features in rural tourism. Cheer (2024) argued that post-pandemic travel to rural areas for vacationing and remote employment facilitates an experience of village life, alleviating fatigue and tension.

Moreover, the rural standard of living is enhanced by attracting tourists to experience agriculture and local culture (Mahida, 2025).

The rural regions' primary attractions include traditional games, authentic and local cuisine, cultural and historical immersion, exposure to agriculture, and interaction with nature and the local community (Samsudin & Maliki, 2015; Huang et al., 2016; Demirovic et al., 2019; Rosalina et al., 2021; Kataya, 2021; Zhu et al., 2023). This means that rural tourism is also referred to as community-based features and experiences. Ohe (2008) argued that rural tourism requires rediscovering the value of local resources that have been overlooked in the modernisation of the national economy. Experiencing village-style living firsthand, witnessing daily activities, and engaging the community in the tourism industry through rural tourism (Pasiran & Xiao, 2013).

Rural tourism development is heavily reliant on the local community's ability to manage local resources effectively. Local resources that were far from modernised are much better suited to rural tourism. The community's ability to provide highly localised, unique cultural and tourism services is crucial to the success of rural tourism. Yi et al. (2024) contend that rural landscapes featuring tourism services through cultural branding can enhance the appeal of local settlements. Rural homestays significantly enhance rural tourism (Zhou et al., 2022), while this initiative preserves local and cultural assets (Chhatterjee et al., 2024). The homestay programme allows tourists to stay with a chosen family in the local environment, taking advantage of the existing natural resources (Pasiran & Xiao, 2013; Samsudin & Maliki, 2015; Ismail et al., 2016; Wahid et al., 2017; Bhuiyan, 2019; Zijing & Pu, 2020; Regmi et al., 2023). In this context, this study addresses homestay programmes in rural tourism.

Homestay Service

The concept of homestay originated as an opportunity for students to engage in cultural exchange while staying far from home. In recent years, a growing number of countries have implemented homestay programmes for

general tourists, recognising the vital function of homestays in rural tourism. According to Lynch (2009), homestays are now an established aspect of tourist accommodations, providing tourists with the opportunity to engage with host families while staying on private property. In addition, the concept of homestay involves a tourist residing with a host family and engaging with the local community at an affordable price (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Malla Thakuri, 2016).

The homestay program's cultural aspects are the primary components that can help the local community acquire knowledge, access information, and incorporate the cultural landscape into their daily lives (Samsudin & Maliki, 2015). Homestays typically offer a limited number of rooms or beds for guests, along with essential services that are compatible with the architectural style of the surrounding area (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Ismail et al., 2016). According to Pusiran and Xiao, the homestay programme offers a village-style experience, enabling participants to observe daily activities firsthand. Homestay programmes typically offer the opportunity to stay with local hosts who are influenced by community culture. Furthermore, Laymount et al. (2020) asserted that a homestay provides guests with a unique opportunity to observe and understand the way of life in a typical community. Rural areas lack the facilities found in urban areas, while homestays are inherent community-based characteristics of a particular region. Homestays can generate additional lodging options and promote rural tourism, thereby positively affecting rural communities (Chhatterjee et al., 2024). Consequently, homestays are appropriate lodging options in rural regions. From prior research, it has been determined that homestay programmes are the main aspect of rural tourism and are expanding segments of the tourism market.

Quang et al.'s (2024) findings indicate that homestay users derive happiness from host families, attitudes and language ability, bedroom quality, original cuisine, peaceful locations, additional services, and reasonable pricing. Users of homestay lodgings are a heterogeneous group. Comprehending this

distinction is a crucial marketing tool (Petakovic et al., 2022). According to Ismail et al. (2016), the quality of homestay services is improved by tourists' participation in the programme and their exposure to the daily habits of host family members. The quality of homestay services is determined by the cultural impact of the services and the interaction between guests and host families in their local environment. Zhou et al. (2022) demonstrate that tourists have high expectations regarding sanitary conditions, sound insulation, and overall room decor. Wahid et al. (2017) found that homestay guests have a higher positive perception of the reliability dimension of service quality than tangibility. It means that the host family's service delivery process is more important to the quality of homestay services than physical facilities. Van and Viet (2019) conclude that homestay tourism is a unique service industry in which hospitality, devotion, and an understanding of customer needs directly impact tourist satisfaction. Homestays have distinctive attributes influenced by local culture, necessitating effective communication by the host family to enable tourists to engage with that culture fully.

According to Zijing and Pu (2020), homestay services prioritise service customisation and the operator's personality over consistency in customer communication. Furthermore, Zijing and Pu suggested that homestay operators interact with customers more during and after their stay, which is a key factor in service quality perception. Important aspects of the homestay experience include the exchange of authentic local food, language, and cultural practices, as well as the opportunity for tourists to interact within a familiar environment (Agyeiwaah, 2019; Kulshrestha & Kulshreshtha, 2019; Kuhzady et al., 2020). Furthermore, to successfully deliver first-hand local service, the host family must prioritise communication with guests. As a result, the quality of homestay services is influenced by the quality of communication between the host family and guests. From this perspective, the activity of homestay operators is more important for understanding the needs of homestay guests.

From the standpoint of the homestay operating system, there are currently two distinct categories of homestays in operation in Nepal (Adhikari & Gautam, 2020; Magar, 2021). There are at least 245 officially recognised communities and 79 private homestays. The operating systems for community and private homestays were different.

Community homestay:

In Nepal, a community homestay is run by at least five people (Adhikari & Gautam, 2020). The community establishes rules and regulations for operating a homestay, and the host family follows the rules. Guests contact the homestay manager, and the management system assigns them to host families. When the community sets prices for lodging, food, and other services, tourists may be required to pay the community for their expenses under certain conditions. The homestay organisation's funds are divided among host families, with the remainder going to organisations that provide cultural activities and community development.

Private homestay:

A homestay run by an individual is known as a private homestay (Adhikari & Gautam, 2020). The host family manages and operates the homestay, providing basic needs for tourists at a reasonable price in a familiar setting. For example, the host family controls the payment system, menu, and other homestay services.

Direct communication between host families and guests in the local environment is extremely effective in improving the quality of homestay services. The level of interaction between the host family and guests varies slightly depending on whether the host family operates a full or partial homestay. For example, in a private homestay, guests can freely negotiate menus and prices, whereas this was difficult in a community homestay. Community homestay guests can interact with local people, whereas private homestay guests have few opportunities to engage with the community as a

whole. The interaction between guests and host families impacts the quality of homestay services by providing guests with cultural experiences. The operating system influences the interaction between the host family and guests, so each homestay has its own service quality. Previous research has looked at homestay service quality from the perspective of cluster homestay (Zijing & Pu, 2020), a specific community (Ismail et al., 2016; Wahid et al., 2017; Bhuiyan, 2019; Laymoun et al., 2020; Voon et al., 2022) that is represented in community homestay.

Homestay is a special lodging service industry in which service quality from the perspective of private homestays is little known; there is a lack of research examining service quality through a comparative analysis of community and private homestays. This study investigates the strengths and weaknesses of each homestay to determine which homestay characteristics are best suited to improving homestay service quality in rural tourism. Homestay managers will use the study's findings to improve homestay service quality and promote a competitive platform for rural tourism destinations to attract more tourists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Nepal is a mountain nation, and it is impossible to operate luxury hotels anywhere, which is why there are many homestays (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2015). Sirubari village is culturally rich and one of the most attractive villages in the Gandaki province of Nepal. The Sirubari community homestay was the first homestay in Nepal. Sirubari village won the gold award from the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in 2001 (Marasini, 2023). Sirubari is home to a majority of Gurung caste residents, with some members of other castes also residing there. Also, the majority of Gurung caste members live in Ghandruk village in Gandaki province, where private homestays were operating successfully. As a result, this study was conducted in Gandaki Province, where both types of homestays operated successfully.

Research design

Evaluate the homestay user experience to enhance comprehension of service quality (Rahayu et al., 2023). The qualitative method enables us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contextual and subjective dimensions of homestay services. Homestays offer a broader experience beyond mere accommodation, encompassing cultural aspects that are often difficult to assess with quantitative methods alone. By conducting in-depth interviews with homestay users, it is possible to explore the overall service quality of homestays, incorporating personal feelings, emotions, and cultural context. The SERVQUAL model has been widely applied to the study of service quality, including that of homestay services (Ismail et al., 2016; Van and Viet, 2019; Laymoun et al., 2020; Praveen & Kumara, 2020; Zijing & Pu, 2020). Modern consumers have elevated expectations about SERVQUAL, and homestay expertise has evolved through a collaborative perspective, making the SERVQUAL model especially appropriate for evaluating service quality (Dai et al., 2025). Dai et al. adopt the SERVQUAL model to examine homestay services using qualitative methods, as SERVQUAL is a widely recognised framework.

Semi-structured interviews were done with each of the eleven homestay guests to investigate the quality of the services provided by the Sirubari and Ghandruk homestays. As such, an interview was guided by the five dimensions of service quality—tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy—developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Tangibility refers to a visible, physical product or service, while reliability concerns the guarantee of promised services and the staff's ability to foster confidence. Assurance is associated with guests' perceived ability, credibility, and security. Responsiveness refers to the willingness to assist guests and accommodate urgent requests. Empathy is correlated with the provision of care and personalised attention from the staff. The interview topic was which aspect of

the homestay service affected the guests' satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

With five females and six males participating in the community homestay and four females and seven males in the private homestay, the interview aimed to compare the quality of the homestay services provided in each. The interviews were conducted when convenient for the participants and in Nepali. For community homestay guests, each interview took an average of 40 minutes, while for private homestay guests, it took 38 minutes. The interviewees were selected from a wide range of ages, genders, and cultural origins. Notes were made during interviews, and audio recordings were done with the full permission of homestay guests. Those who consider recordings unpleasant write the contents notes. Examples of questions asked include: "Which service impresses you?" Which service makes you uncomfortable? Do you engage in cultural activities? Does the host family communicate with you frequently? Interviewees freely shared their homestay experiences, satisfaction, suggestions, and perspectives on improving the quality of homestay services. After all interviews were completed, the transcripts were carefully read to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Colour coding was used to identify distinct response categories and major themes. The transcripts were then reread to identify subthemes within the major themes and to ensure they accurately represented the information gathered during the interviews. After finishing coding, confirm the accuracy of the distinct, unique responses by two tourism scholars. All interviewees' names have been changed to protect their identities.

Table 1: Interviewees profiles

Users	Community homestay				User	Private homestay			
	Gender	Age	Marital	Duration		Gender	Age	Marital	Duration
A	Male	37	Married	50 min	L	Male	55	Married	35min
B	Male	52	Married	35 min	M	Female	24	Married	25min
C	Female	42	Married	25 min	N	Male	22	Single	45min

D	Male	23	Single	55 min	0	Female	34	Married	40min
E	Female	29	Married	35 min	P	Female	42	Married	30min
F	Female	33	Divorced	60 min	Q	Male	62	Married	50min
G	Male	55	Married	30 min	R	Female	39	Married	25min
H	Female	26	Single	35 min	S	Male	42	Married	40min
I	Male	46	Married	40min	T	Male	25	Single	40min
J	Male	30	single	45min	U	Male	32	Single	35min
K	Female	45	Married	25min	V	Male	65	Married	55min

Source: Authors' own

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tangibility: Sirubari homestay

In-depth interview about homestay experience; the main issue raised during the interviews was tangibility. Almost (n=9) homestay users report that the community greets guests at the gate with a cultural programme that was previously announced to the community. At night, local people perform regional cultural dances for homestay guests.

For example, it was revealed that guests staying in homestays experience an outstanding level of hospitality.

“...The way people in the village greet each other is different. When we get to the village's entrance, women with malas come to the gate and play music to welcome us. Then, we go into the village together (B, Male).”

Many homestay guests say that, typically, host families offer meals and lodging in a comfortable setting, as decided by the community. They also offer diverse services.

“... Regarding service offerings, the community will notify the host family in advance. While I order more, enjoy it, and pay more. I get local alcohol and order local snacks as well (J, Male).”

Ghandruk homestay

Most interviewees believe that homestay guests have access to the basic services that guests require. For instance, host families offer their guests food

and lodging, along with other services.

“...My host family and I also cooked dinner together and had a campfire until late. It may be inconvenient for me that there are no advanced facilities, but I am happy because I can freely use the available facilities (0, Female).”

Homestay guests express satisfaction with the limited service range, citing a lack of diversity in offerings.

Reliability: Sirubari homestay

The services to be provided to the community's homestay guests are planned, and the community prepares and delivers them on time. This is where the community's strength comes into play, even if individual host families cannot provide specific services. Homestay guests provide the following information:

“...I was told briefly about the services provided by homestays when I made the reservation over the phone. Meals and bedtimes were pretty much set, so I assumed that every guest would have the same experience (H, Female).”

“...Community members perform the nighttime cultural dances; everyone dresses in traditional clothes and appears to have practised well in advance (A, Male).”

Thus, this study suggests that the community's well-trained nature and instructional proficiency enable it to deliver the promised services accurately.

Ghandruk homestay

The guest was unaware of the homestay's available services. For example:

“...The host families know what services they offer, but I did not know that either. The Basic service was adjusted to me; the host family's home-cooked meals made the service even better than I thought it would be (N, Male).”

Nevertheless, as customer demand increases, it becomes increasingly challenging for host families to offer such services. Sometimes, the host family cannot fulfil the promised service. For example, one participant provided the following information:

“...When I booked my stay, they said they would provide hot water for my morning bath, but it turns out that is not possible (R, Female).”

Assurance: Sirubari homestay

Since the community manages homestays and they are well-run, practically all the guests say they do not worry about security while staying there. The host family was also very sure of their ability to serve. According to homestay guests, the community's training has made the host family very skilled at providing services. In the case of the assurance respondent listed below:

“...They kept their house clean and used as much locally grown food as possible. When making the food I ate, which impressed me (C, Female).”

“...In my opinion, host families have already had a lot of guests, and so have a homestay in the area. I also think that the people who live there are learning how to be good servers (G, Male).”

Thus, this study suggests that being prepared to offer and deliver timely services is beneficial for community homestays.

Ghandruk homestay

Interview results confirmed that the host families were giving the guests the best service they could. The respondents hold a different view on the safety of the host family.

“...I observed my host family prepare a variety of snacks for me, drink alcohol, and I talked about a lot of different things. Since I became family, I feel secure (Q, Male).”

Nevertheless, many homestay guests expressed concerns regarding the level of security. For example, the respondent expresses the following:

“...Safety was what most worried me. Being a guest in a private residence,

I was constantly concerned about my ability to get a good night's sleep (R, Female)."

The host family's limited competence is also a factor to consider in a private homestay. For example, the respondent provided the following information:

"... It is not as though my host family can offer luxurious facilities either, so I am happy. They kindly offered the services that were within their capacity (L, Male)."

Responsiveness: Sirubari homestay

Almost all homestay guests (n=10) were told that the host family provided prompt service and was willing to help them. For example, as one respondent stated below:

"...My host family had already decided what food to serve me in advance, so I ate that, and I was grateful that she made it right away when I asked for soup, because it was cold (K, Female)."

"...The people in the village were kind to me when I was walking around the village. Moreover, offered me water, even though I was not a guest yet. Once I was a guest, and they were kind enough to help me (F, Female)."

Homestay guests are completely satisfied with their lodging and food service. However, one homestay guest reported the following:

"...I heard that a community homestay performs a cultural dance in the evening, but when I went there, they told me it would be hard because they only had a few guests and not much time to get ready (I, Male)."

They must get ready, and that could happen if we arrive without telling them. The community also has its own regulations, and it is imperative to make adequate preparations for a cultural dance, as it cannot be done in a hurry.

Ghandruk homestay

People decide to stay at the homestay after the negotiations. However, homestay guests have reported that host families were unable to provide

services promptly because of their circumstances.

“...The woman who made the dinner left for other business. It was too late to eat since she started preparing dinner after she got back home. Still, the meal was delicious, so it is okay (T, Male).”

Another participant shared an opinion on the handling of immediate guest requests:

“...I thought a lot about what if I suddenly become ill, what I would do, and whether my host family Help me in that situation in this rural area, as it is also difficult for the host family to help me (U, Male).”

Empathy: Sirubari homestay

In terms of empathy, homestay guests have very mixed opinions. Homestay guests express that:

“...Undoubtedly, my host family imparted valuable knowledge to me on a variety of topics, including meal preparation and check-in and check-out procedures. The host family became confused when I requested an appeal regarding the delayed checkout. Occasionally, I would like to learn a lot more about the village, the host family encouraged me to look it up on the internet (E, Female).”

“...The time for the cultural dance had also been set, and I had dinner early to participate, though it was earlier than usual. I was concerned about what I would do if I felt hungry in the middle of the le night (D, Male).”

Thus, this study suggests that the community homestay's weakness lies in its lack of direct access to communication to meet individuals' needs. However, one guest expressed their good experience with personalised attention:

“...My host family is really careful of me; they ask me what food I like and remind me when it is time for bed. They seem like my family members (B,

Male).”

Ghandruk homestay

When they want to do anything more or have specific requests, they can easily contact the host family, and the benefit of homestay is individualised attention.

“...Using the same kitchen as my host family, I was free to prepare whatever I wanted to eat (M, Female).”

“...The cold caused me to have a runny nose; however, I was grateful for the traditional medicine my host family provided (0, Female).”

A very strong point of homestays is good communication and an understanding of guests' needs. Another guest expressed the following:

“...If I stayed in a hotel, I would not be able to talk to the staff as much because they would have to deal with other guests. However, I think homestay is the best way to get exactly what I need. When I am there, I talk a lot about rural life (P, Female).”

Homestay guests say they feel close to the host family, that they are well-listened to, and that individualised attention is good for easy access. Finally, the service quality dimensions and sub-themes for both homestays are presented explicitly in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of the Interviews

Community homestay		
Major themes	Sub-themes	Finding
Tangibility	Lodge	Homestays have accommodation services.
	Culinary	Authentic food and beverage service available.
	Cultural	Homestay offers a specialised dance for the Gurung caste. The community welcomes the guest with a cultural dance.
	Extra service	The host family supplied services, excluding the community food.
Reliability	Dependability	The host family dependably delivers the promised service.
	Preparedness	The host family was adequately prepared to offer a cultural experience.
Assurance	Confidence	The host family has numerous clients and has received community training to deliver services.
	Error-Free	Delivering accurate information and performing tasks.
	Service	Transactions must be secure and precise for the community.
	Security	Feel safe in the group instead of with a single operator.

	Knowledge		The community will teach the host family how to do service.
Responsiveness	Willingness to help	to	When a homestay user needs something, the host family offers extra help. Villagers are friendly and willing to help visitors, even if they do not stay in their own houses.
	Response Complaint	to	Community organisations should respond to complaints promptly.
	Timely		Timetable for community activities as organised by the host family.
			The community intends to conduct cultural activities; however, if a personal request is made to the homestay user, the service will not be provided.
Empathy	Familiar		The host family exhibits familiar behaviour during the homestay.
			The host family does not provide sufficient individual attention to the homestay guest. The community establishes the service and timetable, resulting in inconsistent responses to client inquiries.
Private homestay			
Major themes	Sub-themes		Findings
Tangibility	Lodge		Homestays have accommodation services.
	Culinary		Authentic food and beverage service available
Reliability	Extra service		Campfire until late at night.
	Dependability		The host family constantly provides the same standard of service that they use.
Assurance			Sometimes, they fail to provide what was promised.
	Security		Users of homestays feel safe when they can talk to the host family often.
			Occasionally, unknown family members may evoke feelings of insecurity.
Responsiveness	Willingness to help	to	To facilitate effective communication, the host family is willing to assist the customer in any way possible. The host family operates directly, giving guests easy access.
	Easy access		The host family prioritises their own work and is unable to provide service right away. The host family is unable to respond promptly.
Empathy	Individual attention		Host families provide personalised attention to homestay guests.
	Good communication		The host family is close. Communicate with homestay users without any barriers.
	Emotional		Serve guests like family and help them.

Source: Authors' own

DISCUSSION

The interview's overall result indicates that both homestays provide guests with comfortable and familiar environments. However, the homestay's management system affects the guest experience. For the tangibility dimension of service quality, the Community homestay can offer a wide range of services to guests by leveraging the entire community. Also, the host family can offer additional services with the community's help. Presenting cultural events in a community homestay is simpler compared to a private homestay, as the community offers a diverse range of dances and programmes. In a private homestay, the range of facilities is limited because the host family provides only the services typically found in a private home. Community homestay exhibits a stronger tangibility dimension compared to Private homestay. Petakovic et al. (2022) state that users of homestay accommodations do not constitute a homogeneous group. This is due to the diversity of customer needs, which necessitates a broader range of resources to meet these varying demands. When communities provide greater assistance and can fulfil a wider array of needs, they can better cater to diverse customer expectations.

Homestay guests have a more positive perception of the reliability dimension of service quality compared to tangibility (Wahid et al., 2017). The Community homestay is operated collectively by the entire community, ensuring a high level of trust. Consequently, individuals who opt for homestays experience a heightened sense of security and place greater trust in the community, rather than relying on just an individual. In the case of private homestays, host families also intend to provide exceptional service to their homestay guests. Nevertheless, the limitations of individual capacity pose a significant challenge to enhancing one's weaknesses. The community homestay programme involves the collective support of the community to enable host families to provide the advertised services. Therefore, this study concluded that community homestays are more reliable than private homestays. Community

service is likely to be more reliable than service provided by an individual host.

The service dimension of Assurance is a perfect fit for community homestays. Community hosts receive ongoing training, regular instructions, and status checks on homestay operations, all of which help build confidence and trust through competence. The host family's strong knowledge of guest services and the sense of security provided to guests further enhance the Assurance dimension of service quality in community homestays. Consequently, assurance is successfully conveyed in community homestays. The main issue in the private homestay was safety, as guests stayed in individual homes. When an accident occurs unexpectedly, the host family is often unable to handle the situation. Community homestays offer greater assurance than private homestays.

Responsiveness is also a strong point of community homestays. The primary goal of community homestay organisations is to operate the homestay successfully and ensure tourist satisfaction, whereas private homestay host families often manage the homestay alongside other businesses. As a result, their operations may experience delays or lack consistency. In contrast, community homestays provide clear instructions to host families. When a guest raises a complaint, the organisation responds promptly to address the issue and improve service by providing further guidance to the host family. The organisation maintains a routine operational manual for homestay management, which host families follow to ensure the timely delivery of services to guests.

Quang et al. (2024) found that homestay guests may not necessarily seek familiarity. However, the research emphasises the importance of familiarity in homestays, which is related to the Empathy dimension of service quality. Interestingly, the Empathy dimension is particularly strong in private homestays. While community homestays also provide personalised attention and care to guests, the overall decision-making and actions are not solely taken by the host family; the homestay organisation also plays a role in guest care. In

this context, although host families bear some responsibility, they also rely on the organisation because they pay a percentage of their earnings to it. Consequently, the personalised attention guests receive in community homestays may be slightly lower than in private homestays. In private homestays, the negotiated price, added services, and schedules are not determined by the organisation, allowing for more direct communication between the guest and the host family. This fosters a stronger connection and emotional attachment between the guest and the host family. As a result, the Empathy dimension is more pronounced in private homestays.

Both homestays have distinct attributes, advantages, and disadvantages. Community homestays offer superior service compared to private homestays. The influence of the community and the host family's power can significantly affect the quality of community homestay services. This research presents a comparative analysis of private and community homestays in terms of service quality, employing a qualitative method. While the operating systems of the two types of homestays differ, community homestays provide better service quality than private homestays. The empirical findings indicate that the dimension of empathy in service quality is superior in private homestays.

Ultimately, community homestays are well-suited to rural tourism, where the community's collective effort is crucial to guest satisfaction. Previous research has primarily focused on community homestays (Zhou et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023; Chin et al., 2024; Nurfadilah, 2024; Dai et al., 2025; Sroypetch et al., 2025). However, this study differs in that it examines both types of homestays and explores their strengths and weaknesses. Community-based tourism is widely recognised as an effective tool for rural development (Rahayu et al., 2023). This study also provides empirical evidence demonstrating that community homestays benefit rural tourism development. Previous studies have examined service quality in the context of homestay services (Wahid et al., 2017; Petakovic et al., 2022; Sroypetch et al., 2025), but

they have focused solely on community homestays and have not addressed the overall service quality dimensions. This research addresses the identified gap. This research explicitly examines the weaknesses of community homestays. Previous research has explored that a familiar environment is a key feature of homestays (Ismail et al., 2016; Dhakal, 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2023). However, this study conducts a comparative analysis of service quality, considering the familiar environment within the overall service context. Individual communication and personalised attention should be improved in community homestays, as these are essential for fostering a sense of familiarity among homestay guests.

CONCLUSION

Operating a luxury hotel in a rural area is difficult due to limited assets. Thus, homestay service is a favourable choice for lodging in rural areas, managed by local assets. It is possible to run a community homestay in a rural area, which is operated and managed by the entire community. Nepal is a rural country, and rural areas offer two types of homestays: community homestays and private homestays, providing lodging in a familiar environment. Although there exist two types of homestays, previous research has mainly examined community-type homestays to evaluate service quality. This study investigated both types of homestay service quality and conducted a comparative analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each homestay, providing crucial knowledge to improve homestay service quality in rural areas.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that community homestays outperform private homestays in service quality. The effective collaboration between the community and host family enhances the tangible, responsive, assurance, and reliable aspects of community homestays. Nevertheless, community homestays exhibit certain weaknesses that are stronger in private homestays. In a private homestay, the host family directly

manages the accommodation, and there is extensive communication throughout the service provision process. Within the community homestay, the host family operated the homestay under community oversight, resulting in limited communication between the host family and guests. The informal interaction between the host family and guests enhances the dimension of empathy in service quality.

Nevertheless, community homestays provide superior service and are a more appropriate accommodation choice for rural regions. The findings of this study provide sufficient knowledge to understand which aspects of service quality are required to improve homestays. This empirical study assists homestay management organisations in rural areas in improving the quality of homestay services. Community homestays need to improve the operating system that encourages communication between host families and homestay guests. Moreover, private homestay establishments need to enhance their facilities and provide comprehensive training for host families to improve the quality of their services.

Although the current study has theoretical and managerial implications for the field of homestay, it also has limitations. This investigation utilised a qualitative research methodology. However, an additional study could use quantitative methods to evaluate the quality of service offered by both homestays.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Regarding the writing and/or publishing of this research, the authors indicated that they had no possible conflicts of interest.

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