



Service Quality Frameworks in Emerging Farm Tourism Destinations: A Systematic Review of Kerala Based Research

 Aswathy R V^{1*}

¹Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Government Arts College, Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram, India.

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*Corresponding Author: rv.aswathyfeb23@gmail.com

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Farm tourism has emerged as an important component of rural tourism and sustainable rural development, particularly in agriculturally rich regions such as Kerala. Service quality plays a significant role in determining tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and the sustainability of farm tourism destinations. The purpose of this study is to systematically review service quality frameworks applied in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala and to identify key service quality dimensions and determinants of tourist satisfaction. The study adopts a systematic review methodology using published research articles related to farm tourism, agritourism, service quality, and tourist satisfaction. The review identifies that SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, the 7Ps service marketing framework, and the 3Es model are the major service quality frameworks used in farm tourism research. The findings of the study indicate that infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, physical evidence, price worthiness, promotion, and customer service processes are the major determinants of service quality and tourist satisfaction in farm tourism destinations. The study also identifies major challenges in service quality implementation such as poor infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, accessibility issues, lack of promotion, and limited technology adoption. The study concludes that improving service quality dimensions can significantly enhance tourist satisfaction and contribute to sustainable farm tourism development.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Farm Tourism, Agritourism, SERVQUAL, Rural Tourism, Sustainable Tourism.*



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1. Introduction

Tourism has undergone a significant transformation from mass tourism to experience-based and sustainable tourism, where tourists increasingly seek authentic rural and agricultural

experiences. Farm tourism, often used interchangeably with agritourism, has emerged as an important segment of rural tourism that contributes to rural development, agricultural diversification, and income generation for farmers.

Farm tourism refers to tourism activities conducted on working farms where visitors can experience agricultural life, participate in farm activities, and enjoy rural culture and environment (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). This form of tourism not only supports farm income diversification but also promotes sustainable rural development by integrating tourism and agriculture.

Kerala, known as “God’s Own Country,” has strong potential for farm tourism due to its rich agricultural resources, plantation crops, and established tourism infrastructure. The state’s agricultural diversity, including tea, coffee, rubber, spices, and coconut plantations, provides a suitable environment for the development of farm tourism destinations. The combination of natural beauty, agricultural heritage, and tourism demand makes Kerala an emerging destination for farm tourism development.

Service quality is one of the most important determinants of tourist satisfaction in tourism destinations. Due to the intangible and heterogeneous nature of tourism services, measuring and managing service quality is more complex than in manufacturing sectors (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In tourism, service quality includes not only physical facilities but also staff behavior, accessibility, pricing, safety, infrastructure, and overall tourist experience. Previous studies have shown that service quality has a direct impact on tourist satisfaction, behavioral intention, and destination competitiveness (Zabkar et al., 2010).

Several service quality frameworks have been developed to measure service quality in tourism, among which SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are the most widely used models. The SERVQUAL model measures service quality based on five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVPERF model, developed by Cronin and Taylor (1992), focuses on performance-based service quality measurement. In addition, the 7Ps service marketing framework and the 3Es model (effectiveness, efficiency, and equity) are also used to evaluate service quality in tourism destinations.

In the context of Kerala farm tourism, previous studies have identified several service quality determinants such as infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, physical evidence,

price worthiness, and customer service processes. Infrastructure-related factors such as transportation, signage, communication facilities, and medical facilities significantly influence tourist satisfaction, especially for foreign tourists (Poulouse & Ushadevi, 2024). Studies also indicate that domestic tourists are generally more satisfied than foreign tourists due to differences in expectations and service standards (Deepthi, 2024; Jincy & Reshmi, 2023). These findings indicate the existence of service quality gaps in emerging farm tourism destinations.

2. Research Problem

Service quality plays a crucial role in tourism because tourism services are intangible, heterogeneous, and experience-based, making service quality difficult to measure and manage (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In farm tourism, service quality includes not only accommodation and hospitality services but also farm experience, safety, accessibility, infrastructure, pricing, and interaction with farm owners. If service quality is poor, tourist satisfaction decreases, which negatively affects revisit intention and destination competitiveness (Zabkar et al., 2010).

Previous studies conducted in Kerala farm tourism destinations identified several service quality gaps, particularly related to infrastructure, accessibility, trained guides, medical facilities, and communication services. These issues were found to significantly affect tourist satisfaction, especially among foreign tourists who have higher expectations regarding infrastructure and service standards (Poulouse & Ushadevi, 2024). Similarly, studies on agritourism service quality in Kerala found that service personnel, physical evidence, accessibility, and price worthiness are important determinants of tourist satisfaction (Deepthi, 2024; Jincy & Reshmi, 2023).

Although several service quality models such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are used in tourism research, there is no standardized service quality framework specifically developed for farm tourism destinations.

3. Research Objectives

- To identify the service quality frameworks used in farm tourism research in Kerala.
- To examine the major service quality dimensions in farm tourism destinations.

- To analyze the determinants of service quality and tourist satisfaction in farm tourism.
- To identify service quality gaps in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala.
- To review the challenges in implementing service quality practices in farm tourism.
- To suggest future research directions for improving service quality in farm tourism destinations.

4. Research Questions

- What service quality frameworks are used in farm tourism research in Kerala?
- What are the major service quality dimensions in farm tourism destinations?
- What factors determine tourist satisfaction in farm tourism destinations?
- What are the major service quality gaps in Kerala farm tourism destinations?
- What challenges are faced in implementing service quality practices in farm tourism?
- What are the future research directions in farm tourism service quality research?

5. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Farm tourism allows farmers to generate additional income while preserving agricultural heritage and rural culture (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). In Kerala, farm tourism has gained importance due to the state's agricultural diversity, plantation economy, and established tourism sector. Plantation crops such as tea, coffee, rubber, spices, and coconut provide opportunities for developing farm-based tourism experiences. However, the success of farm tourism destinations depends largely on the quality of services provided to tourists, which influences tourist satisfaction and revisit intention.

Service quality is a key factor influencing tourist satisfaction in tourism destinations. Service quality is defined as the gap between customer expectations and perceived service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In tourism, service quality includes both tangible elements such as infrastructure, accommodation, and physical facilities, and intangible elements such as staff behavior, hospitality, safety, and overall tourist experience. High service quality leads to higher tourist satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth, and

revisit intention, which are essential for the sustainability of tourism destinations (Zabkar et al., 2010). In the context of farm tourism, service quality is more complex because it includes agricultural experiences along with tourism services. Therefore, service quality in farm tourism must be evaluated using multiple dimensions such as infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, physical environment, pricing, and customer service processes.

Several service quality frameworks have been used in tourism and farm tourism research to measure service quality and tourist satisfaction. Among these frameworks, the SERVQUAL model is the most widely used model for measuring service quality. The SERVQUAL model measures service quality using five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This model is widely used in tourism research to evaluate tourist perceptions of service quality. Another important model is the SERVPERF model, which focuses on performance-based service quality measurement and measures only perceived service performance instead of measuring the gap between expectations and perceptions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). The SERVPERF model is considered more suitable for tourism services where tourist expectations vary across destinations and tourist segments.

Previous studies conducted in Kerala farm tourism destinations have identified several service quality dimensions that influence tourist satisfaction. These include infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, physical evidence, price worthiness, promotion, customer service process, and support facilities. Studies have shown that infrastructure and accessibility are the most important determinants of service quality in farm tourism destinations because poor transportation, lack of signage, inadequate communication facilities, and limited medical facilities negatively affect tourist satisfaction, especially among foreign tourists (Poulose & Ushadevi, 2024). Similarly, studies on agritourism service quality in Kerala found that service personnel, physical environment, price worthiness, and customer service processes significantly influence tourist satisfaction (Deepthi, 2024; Jincy & Reshmi, 2023).

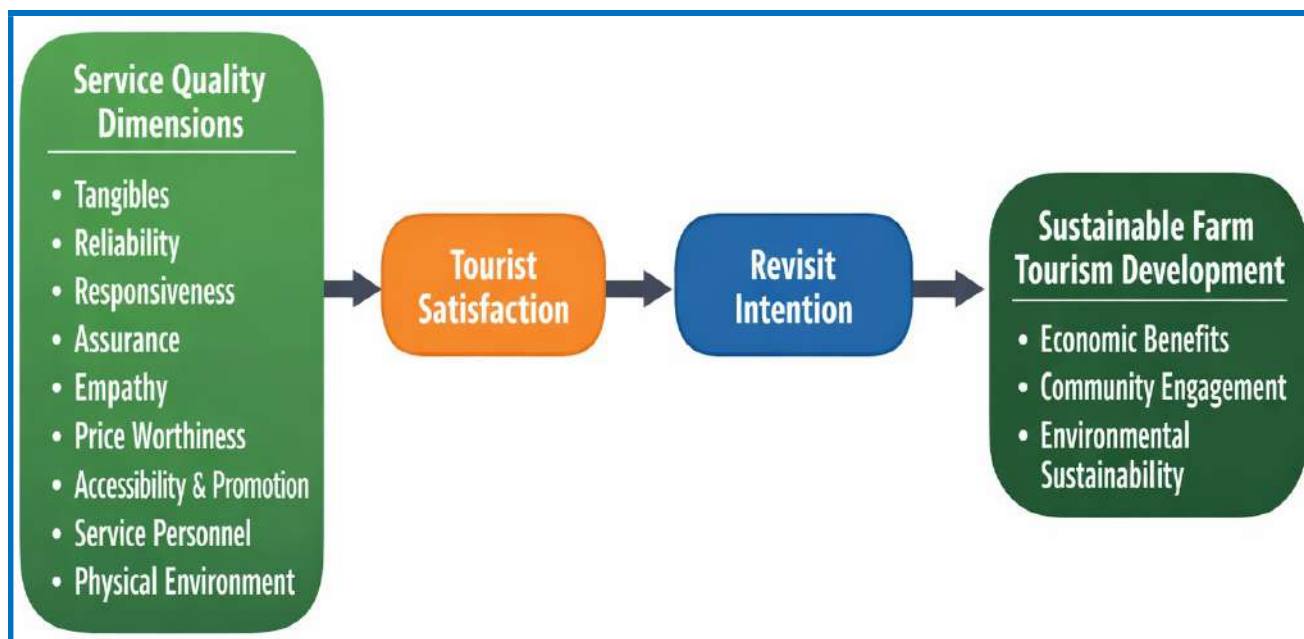


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Service Quality in Farm Tourism

6. Methodology

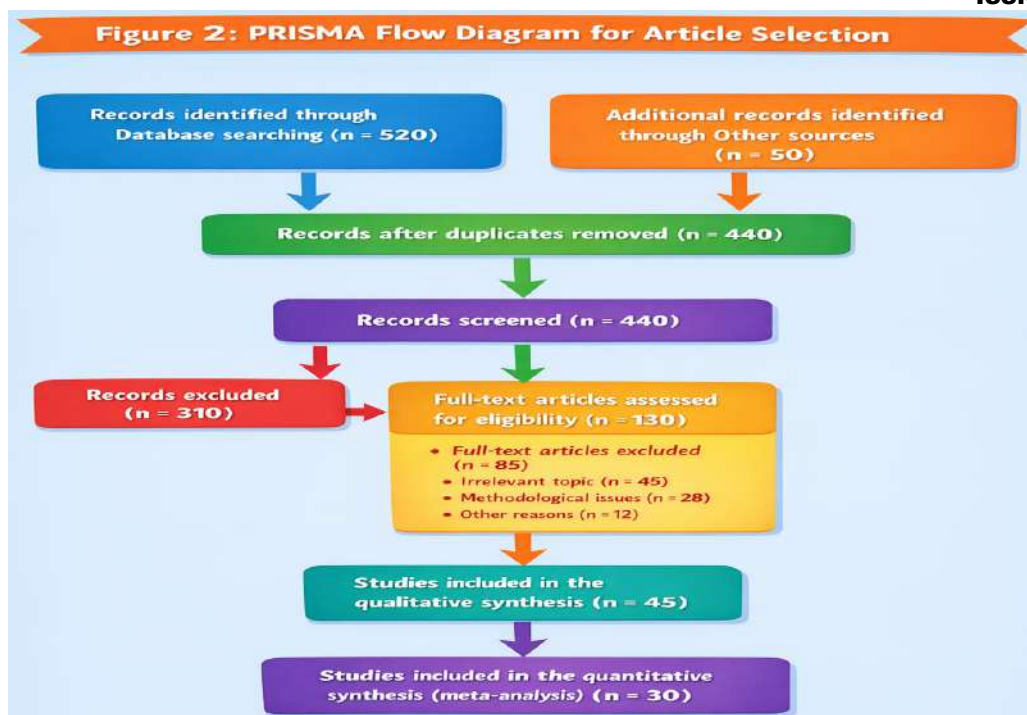
This study adopts a systematic review methodology to examine service quality frameworks applied in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala. The systematic review approach is appropriate for this study because it enables the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing research in a structured and transparent manner. This method is widely used in tourism and service quality research to summarize existing literature, identify research gaps, and develop a conceptual understanding of research themes related to service quality and tourist satisfaction.

The research design of the study is qualitative in nature and is based on secondary data collected from published research articles, journals, and academic databases. Research articles were collected from databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Semantic Scholar, ResearchGate, and tourism and agricultural journals. These databases were selected because they provide access to peer-reviewed research articles related to farm tourism, agritourism, and service quality. The research articles were identified using keywords such as “farm tourism,” “agritourism,” “service quality,” “tourist satisfaction,” “SERVQUAL,” “SERVPERF,” and “farm tourism Kerala.” The search was limited to articles

published between 2005 and 2025 to include relevant and recent studies.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select relevant research articles for the systematic review. The inclusion criteria included studies related to farm tourism or agritourism, studies focusing on service quality or tourist satisfaction, studies conducted in Kerala or relevant to Kerala, peer-reviewed journal articles, and articles published in English. The exclusion criteria included studies not related to farm tourism, studies not related to service quality, non-English publications, duplicate articles, and conference abstracts without full papers.

The study selection process followed the PRISMA framework, which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. Relevant information such as author, year, objectives, methodology, sample size, service quality framework used, and key findings was extracted from the selected studies. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify service quality frameworks, service quality dimensions, determinants of tourist satisfaction, and service quality gaps in farm tourism destinations. The findings are presented in tables and figures for better understanding.



7. Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of the systematic review of service quality frameworks applied in farm tourism destinations in Kerala. The selected studies were analyzed to identify service quality frameworks, service quality dimensions, and determinants of tourist satisfaction. The findings of the review are presented in the following tables.

Table 1: Summary of Reviewed Studies on Farm Tourism Service Quality in Kerala

Author	Year	Objective	Methodology	Sample	Framework Used	Key Findings
Jincy & Reshmi	2023	To analyze service quality in farm tourism	Survey	120 tourists	SERVPERF	Service quality significantly influences tourist satisfaction
Deepthi	2024	To examine impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction	Survey & Factor Analysis	100 tourists	7Ps Model	Infrastructure, service personnel, and price worthiness influence satisfaction
Poulose & Ushadevi	2024	To compare domestic and foreign tourist satisfaction	SERVQUAL Survey	300 tourists	SERVQUAL	Foreign tourists less satisfied due to infrastructure issues
Priyadarshan et al.	2025	To study agritourism and farmers' income	Comparative Study	Farmers	Not specific	Agritourism improves farmers' income

Wani et al.	2024	To study service quality factors in tourism	Regression Analysis	Tourists	Service Quality Model	Infrastructure is key determinant
Taheri et al.	2019	To evaluate service performance	Model Development	Secondary Data	3Es Model	Effectiveness, efficiency, equity important
Cronin & Taylor	1992	To develop SERVPERF model	Model Development	Secondary	SERVPERF	Performance-based service quality model

8. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to systematically review service quality frameworks applied in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala and to identify key service quality dimensions and determinants of tourist satisfaction. The findings indicate that service quality in farm tourism is multidimensional and influenced by both infrastructure-related factors and service delivery factors. The review shows that SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are the most commonly used frameworks for measuring service quality in farm tourism, followed by the 7Ps service marketing framework and the 3Es model.

The study found that infrastructure and accessibility are the most important determinants of tourist satisfaction in farm tourism destinations. Poor transportation, lack of signage, inadequate communication facilities, and limited medical facilities negatively affect tourist satisfaction, particularly among foreign tourists. In addition, service personnel and hospitality were identified as important factors influencing tourist satisfaction, as farm tourism involves direct interaction between tourists and farm operators. Price worthiness and physical evidence such as cleanliness, accommodation, and farm environment also influence tourist satisfaction.

The study also identified a service quality gap between domestic and foreign tourists, where foreign tourists reported lower satisfaction due to higher expectations regarding infrastructure and service standards. The study contributes to the literature by integrating various service quality frameworks and proposing a conceptual framework linking service quality dimensions, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and sustainable farm tourism development.

9. Challenges in Service Quality Implementation

The implementation of service quality practices in farm tourism destinations is a major challenge, particularly in emerging destinations such as Kerala where farm tourism is still in the developmental stage. Since farm tourism is mostly operated by farmers and rural households who may not have professional training in tourism management, maintaining consistent service quality standards becomes difficult.

One of the major challenges is inadequate infrastructure, including poor roads, transportation, sanitation facilities, signage, communication facilities, and medical facilities. These infrastructure issues reduce accessibility and negatively affect tourist satisfaction. Another major challenge is the lack of trained service personnel, as farm tourism operators often lack formal training in hospitality and customer service.

Accessibility is also a significant challenge because many farm tourism destinations are located in remote rural areas with poor connectivity and limited transport facilities. In addition, the lack of standardized service quality measurement systems makes it difficult for farm tourism operators to measure and improve service quality. Pricing is another challenge, as farm tourism operators must balance between affordable pricing and maintaining service quality.

Promotion and marketing are also limited in many farm tourism destinations due to lack of digital presence and marketing strategies. Furthermore, lack of government support, financial assistance, and training programs slows down the development of farm tourism. Limited adoption of digital technology such as online booking and digital marketing also affects service quality improvement.

10. Future Research Directions

The systematic review of service quality frameworks in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala identifies several research gaps that provide directions for future research. One of the major areas for future research is the development of a farm tourism service quality measurement scale specifically designed for farm tourism destinations, as existing models such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF may not fully capture the unique characteristics of farm tourism.

Future research should also focus on developing comprehensive models that integrate service quality dimensions, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and sustainable farm tourism development. Comparative studies between Kerala and other states can help identify regional differences in service quality and farm tourism development. Another important research area is the role of digital technology in improving service quality through online booking systems, digital marketing, and social media promotion.

Future studies should also focus on sustainable farm tourism, including environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. In addition, more research is needed from the farmers' perspective, as most existing studies focus only on tourists. Longitudinal studies are also required to understand changes in service quality and tourist satisfaction over time. Finally, future research should examine the role of government policies, training programs, and infrastructure development in improving service quality in farm tourism destinations.

11. Conclusion

Farm tourism has emerged as an important component of rural tourism and sustainable rural development, particularly in agriculturally rich regions such as Kerala. The success and sustainability of farm tourism destinations largely depend on the quality of services provided to tourists. This study conducted a systematic review of service quality frameworks applied in emerging farm tourism destinations in Kerala and found that SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, the 7Ps service marketing framework, and the 3Es model are the major frameworks used to measure service quality.

The study identified key service quality dimensions such as infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, physical evidence, price

worthiness, promotion, and customer service process. Among these, infrastructure, accessibility, service personnel, and physical environment were found to be the most important determinants of tourist satisfaction. The study also found that service quality has a direct influence on tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and sustainable farm tourism development.

The study concludes that improving infrastructure, training service personnel, improving accessibility, and adopting technology are essential for improving service quality in farm tourism destinations. The study also contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual framework linking service quality, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and sustainable farm tourism development. Overall, improving service quality is essential for enhancing tourist satisfaction and ensuring the sustainable development of farm tourism destinations in Kerala.

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