

MEASURING EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE: UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AT SOBRETUDO FUNERAL HOME WITH THE SERVQUAL MODEL

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Abstract : This study examined the level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province using the SERVQUAL model. Anchored on Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, the study aimed to determine the demographic profile of customers, assess their level of satisfaction across the five service quality dimensions, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, and describe customers’ lived experiences with funeral service delivery. A mixed-method research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from thirty (30) customers through a structured SERVQUAL-based survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with three purposively selected participants. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses. Results revealed that the overall composite weighted mean across all SERVQUAL dimensions was 4.04, interpreted as a high level of customer satisfaction. Among the dimensions, assurance obtained the highest mean, followed by responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and tangibility. These findings indicate that customer satisfaction was primarily driven by staff competence, professionalism, and emotional support rather than physical or promotional aspects of service. Qualitative findings further revealed that proactive service delivery and compassionate staff behavior often compensated for limitations in tangibility, such as the lack of informational and promotional materials. However, some customers expressed hesitation and doubt due to weaknesses in physical presentation. Indeed, the study highlights the importance of human-centered service delivery in emotionally sensitive industries. The findings provide practical insights for service improvement, customer-centered management, and policy support for funeral service providers at the community level.

IndexTerms - customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL model, funeral services, service quality, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility, Maasim, Sarangani Province, mixed-method research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Death is an inevitable human experience that transcends time, culture, and social class. In contemporary society, however, the management of death has gradually shifted from purely family- and community-based practices to professionalized funeral service providers. Funeral homes now play a crucial role in assisting bereaved families by offering not only technical services such as body preparation and burial arrangements, but also emotional support during moments of grief. In the Philippines, where strong family ties, religious traditions, and communal values shape funeral practices, the quality of funeral services significantly influences how families cope with loss.

Globally, service quality has become a major determinant of customer satisfaction across service-oriented industries. The International Organization for Standardization emphasizes that service quality directly affects customer trust, loyalty, and organizational sustainability (ISO, 2021). In emotionally sensitive industries such as funeral services, service quality becomes even more critical because clients are often vulnerable and emotionally distressed. Poor service delivery in such contexts can intensify grief and negatively affect families’ overall bereavement experience, making quality standards a moral as well as a professional obligation. Recent global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of responsive, reliable, and compassionate funeral services, as restrictions altered traditional mourning practices and increased reliance on professional service providers (Rawlings, Miller-Lewis, & Tieman, 2024).

At the national level, the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022) reported a steady increase in mortality rates during public health crises, resulting in heightened demand for funeral services. Locally, funeral homes in municipalities such as Maasim, Sarangani Province operate in a competitive environment where service reputation, empathy, and reliability directly influence patronage. Despite this, many local funeral service providers lack systematic assessments of customer satisfaction, relying instead on informal feedback.

Although funeral services are indispensable, there is limited empirical research in the Philippine context, particularly at the municipal level, examining how customers evaluate funeral service quality. Sobretudo Funeral Home, a local service provider in Maasim, Sarangani Province, operates within a culturally sensitive and emotionally demanding market. However, there is no formal, data-driven assessment of how its services meet customer expectations across key service quality dimensions.

Furthermore, most existing local studies on service quality focus on hospitality, healthcare, or retail sectors, leaving funeral services underexplored. This created a research gap, especially in understanding how the SERVQUAL dimensions, tangibles,

reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, apply within the funeral service industry. Without empirical evidence from this sector, service providers lack data-driven guidance for aligning operational practices with the emotional and cultural expectations of bereaved clients. Addressing this gap was essential for improving service delivery, ensuring ethical standards, and strengthening community trust.

Moreover, this study is socially and culturally significant because funeral practices are deeply rooted in Filipino values of pakikipagkapwa, damayan, and religious devotion. Quality funeral services help preserve dignity, respect cultural rituals, and support emotional healing. Politically and legally, funeral homes are regulated by local government units and the Department of Health to ensure public safety, sanitation, and ethical business practices. Assessing customer satisfaction supports evidence-based policy formulation and strengthens regulatory compliance at the local level.

Additionally, from a historical perspective, the professionalization of funeral services reflects changing societal structures and urbanization. Current events, including post-pandemic recovery and rising consumer awareness, have increased expectations for transparency, professionalism, and compassion in service delivery. Thought leaders in service management argue that customer-centered evaluation models are essential for sustaining trust in high-contact service industries (Ladhari, 2020).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the growing body of service quality literature by applying the SERVQUAL model in a funeral service context, an area that remains underrepresented in recent empirical research. While SERVQUAL has been widely used in hospitality and healthcare, its application to funeral services at the local level introduced contextual novelty.

Methodologically, this study employed a descriptive quantitative design

focused on customer perceptions, addressing a research gap in Philippine funeral service studies that often rely on anecdotal evidence. The findings enriched Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) discourse by demonstrating how service quality measurement tools can be adapted to emotionally sensitive industries. This aligns with the discipline's emphasis on customer satisfaction, ethical service delivery, and sustainable business practices.

Likewise, this study was personally significant to the researchers as students of the ABM strand who have observed, within their own communities, how funeral services impact families during moments of loss. Personal encounters with funeral service providers revealed variations in service quality, empathy, and professionalism, which inspired the researchers to examine this issue systematically. Conducting this study allowed the researchers to develop practical research skills while addressing a real-world concern relevant to their local context and future careers in business and service management.

Similarly, this research was anchored on relevant legal and policy frameworks, including the Local Government Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 7160), which mandates LGUs to regulate businesses and protect consumer welfare; Department of Health guidelines on sanitation and public health for funeral establishments; and consumer protection principles under Republic Act No. 7394 (Consumer Act of the Philippines). These legal bases underscored the necessity of ensuring quality, ethical, and customer-centered funeral services.

In view of the foregoing discussions, the main objective of this study was to evaluate the level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home using the SERVQUAL model, as proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry and supported by recent service quality research (Ladhari, 2020). Specifically, the study aimed to assess customer satisfaction across the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy to identify strengths and areas for service improvement.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the level of customer satisfaction with the services offered by the Sobretudo funeral home in Maasim, Sarangani Province using the SERVQUAL service quality dimensions.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age Range;
 - 1.2 Gender;
 - 1.3 Frequency of Patronage; and,
 - 1.4 Occupation?
2. What is the level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of the following service quality dimensions:
 - 2.1 Reliability;
 - 2.2 Responsiveness;
 - 2.3 Assurance;
 - 2.4 Empathy; and,
 - 2.5 Tangibility?
3. How do customers describe their experiences with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides empirical insights into customer satisfaction within the funeral service industry, an area that remains underexplored despite its critical role in supporting bereaved families and maintaining community trust. By systematically assessing service quality using a structured framework, the study generated findings that may serve as a valuable basis for service improvement, ethical practice, and informed decision-making. The results of this research were expected to benefit various stakeholders, including funeral home management, employees, customers, local government units, the academic community, and students, as each group plays a vital role in enhancing the quality and sustainability of funeral services.

Sobretudo Funeral Home Management and Owners. The findings of this study may provide the management with empirical, data-driven insights into customers' perceptions of their services across key service quality dimensions. These results may guide strategic planning, service enhancement, staff training, and policy formulation aimed at improving customer satisfaction, service efficiency, and overall organizational credibility.

Employees and Service Personnel of Funeral Homes. Funeral home staff may benefit from the study as it identifies strengths and areas needing improvement in service delivery, particularly in responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The results may serve as a basis for professional development, values formation, and skills training to enhance compassionate and ethical service provision.

Customers and Bereaved Families. Clients and future customers may benefit from improved service quality resulting from the study's recommendations. Enhanced funeral services may help ensure dignity, respect, emotional support, and culturally appropriate practices during times of loss, contributing to a more positive bereavement experience.

Local Government Units (LGUs) and Regulatory Agencies. LGUs and concerned regulatory bodies may use the findings as reference in monitoring compliance with service standards, consumer protection policies, and public health regulations. The study may support evidence-based decision-making and local policy development related to funeral service operations.

Maasim Community and Society. Maasim community benefits as improved funeral services promote social trust, cultural sensitivity, and ethical business practices. High-quality funeral services also contribute to community well-being by supporting families during emotionally challenging periods.

Academic Community and Future Researchers. This study contributes to the limited body of local literature on funeral service quality and customer satisfaction. It may serve as a reference for future studies in service quality, customer satisfaction, or emotionally sensitive service industries, particularly within business and management disciplines. Furthermore, the findings may help refine theoretical models and research instruments for culturally and emotionally sensitive service contexts.

ABM Students and Educators. Students under the Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) strand may benefit by gaining practical exposure to applying business concepts such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and data-driven decision-making in real-world contexts. Educators may also use the study as an instructional material or case reference.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on assessing customer satisfaction with the services provided by Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province. Conceptually, the study examined customer satisfaction using the SERVQUAL model, specifically its five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These concepts were analyzed within the context of funeral service delivery, emphasizing how service quality is perceived by customers who have availed of the funeral home's services for at least one (1) year and above. The study aimed to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in service delivery in order to enhance overall customer satisfaction.

Methodologically, the study employed a mixed-method research design. Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant's Interview (KII) using the open-ended responses to gather deeper insights into customers' experiences and perceptions of service quality. The respondents consisted of 30 individuals who had previously availed of the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home and met the inclusion criteria. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that only eligible participants were included.

Geographically, the study covered selected barangays in Maasim, Sarangani Province, particularly Colon and Poblacion, as well as Malbang, Kabatiol, and Kablacan, where the respondents resided. Data collection was conducted during the School Year 2025-2026, allowing the researchers to obtain relevant and recent feedback on service experiences.

However, the study was delimited in several aspects. It included only customers of Sobretudo Funeral Home who availed of its services at least one (1) year prior to the conduct of the study, while customers of other funeral service providers were excluded. Respondents from areas outside the specified barangays were not considered. The study was limited to a sample size of 30 respondents, which, while manageable, may affect the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

Conceptually, the study focused solely on customer satisfaction based on the SERVQUAL framework; other service quality models were not utilized. Moreover, internal organizational factors such as employee performance, management practices, and operational processes that indirectly influence service quality were beyond the scope of the study. Consequently, the findings were specific to Sobretudo Funeral Home and the selected locations and cannot be generalized to other funeral homes or broader contexts.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study was anchored on the Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), originally proposed by Richard L. Oliver (2020), and operationalized through the SERVQUAL Model of Service Quality developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory posits that customer satisfaction is formed through a comparison between customers' prior expectations and their perceived performance of a service. According to the theory, satisfaction occurs when perceived performance meets or exceeds expectations (positive disconfirmation), while dissatisfaction arises when performance falls below expectations (negative disconfirmation).

The theory assumes that customers are rational evaluators who consciously or unconsciously assess service experiences against internal standards shaped by prior experiences, cultural norms, and situational factors. In service-oriented industries, especially those involving high customer contact, expectations are often influenced by emotional states and social context. Thus, EDT provides a robust explanation of how satisfaction judgments are formed in complex service encounters.

Within the context of this study, Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory was applied to understand how customers of Sobretudo Funeral Home evaluated the services they received during periods of bereavement. Funeral services were characterized by emotional vulnerability, unfamiliar procedures, and strong cultural and religious expectations, making expectation–performance comparisons particularly salient. Customers entered the service encounter with expectations regarding professionalism, compassion, timeliness, and respect.

Their satisfaction was determined by how well the funeral home's actual service delivery aligned with or exceeded these expectations. The general research problem of this study, assessing customer satisfaction with funeral services, directly reflected the central mechanism of EDT, which explains satisfaction as an outcome of perceived confirmation or disconfirmation. Therefore,

the theory provided a logical and empirically supported foundation for examining customer satisfaction in emotionally sensitive service settings.

To operationalize Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory in measurable terms, this study utilized the SERVQUAL Model, which translated abstract satisfaction judgments into five concrete service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. SERVQUAL complemented EDT by specifying the aspects of service performance that customers evaluated when forming satisfaction judgments. Reliability captured whether promised services were delivered accurately, responsiveness reflected promptness and willingness to help, assurance conveyed competence and trustworthiness, empathy represented individualized care and emotional support, and tangibility referred to physical facilities and appearance.

These dimensions corresponded directly to the performance component of EDT, allowing the study to quantitatively assess how perceived service quality led to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. As reviewed in Chapter 2, numerous recent studies validated the strong relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction across service industries, including healthcare and funeral-related services.

Moreover, the use of Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory was particularly justified for this study because it accounted for the subjective and emotional nature of customer satisfaction in funeral services. Alternative theories, such as Equity Theory or Attribution Theory, focus on fairness or causal explanations but did not fully capture the expectation-based evaluations central to service satisfaction. EDT was more suitable because funeral service customers often had limited prior experience and relied heavily on expectations shaped by culture, religion, and community norms.

Besides, the SERVQUAL framework aligned with EDT allowed for structured assessment while remaining flexible enough to reflect emotional and cultural nuances. Studies reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrated that in high-contact and emotionally sensitive services, satisfaction was best explained by how well services met expectations related to empathy, assurance, and responsiveness. Thus, EDT provided a more comprehensive explanation than purely transactional or economic theories.

Furthermore, given that this study employed a mixed-method research design with greater emphasis on the quantitative strand, Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory primarily supported the quantitative testing of relationships between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. The SERVQUAL dimensions functioned as independent variables, while customer satisfaction served as the dependent variable, consistent with EDT's assumption that performance perceptions predicted satisfaction outcomes. The qualitative component of the study further enriched the framework by contextualizing how expectations were shaped by Filipino cultural values such as pakikipagkapwa, damayan, and religious observances.

In this way, the theory also framed the interpretation of qualitative findings by explaining why certain dimensions were more salient in the local funeral service context. Overall, Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, operationalized through the SERVQUAL model, provided a strong theoretical lens for understanding, measuring, and interpreting customer satisfaction with funeral services in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Research Gap

The studies reviewed in Chapter 2 collectively examined customer satisfaction and service quality across various service-oriented industries, including healthcare, hospitality, banking, education, counseling, and selected funeral-related contexts. Key authors frequently cited in these studies include Oliver (2020) on customer satisfaction theory, Zeithaml et al. (2020) on service quality and SERVQUAL, Ladhari (2020) on emotional satisfaction in services, Rather et al. (2022) on satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, and Cheng et al. (2021) on high-contact service environments. Recent empirical works by Nguyen et al. (2023), Rahmatia (2025), Hosseinzadeh (2024), Gazi (2024), and Wider (2024) demonstrated the applicability of SERVQUAL across different industries. Studies focusing specifically on emotionally sensitive services highlighted the importance of empathy, assurance, and responsiveness, while research on funeral services and death-care emphasized cultural sensitivity, ethical conduct, and emotional support (Walter, 2020; Lim & Teo, 2022; Santos & Dela Peña, 2023). Filipino cultural and religious perspectives were discussed by Yabut and Cruz (2021), De Leon (2023), Montesa (2024), and University of the Philippines CIDS (2023), underscoring the role of pakikipagkapwa, damayan, and religious observances in shaping service expectations. Collectively, these studies established that customer satisfaction in high-contact and emotionally sensitive services was influenced by multidimensional service quality and contextual factors.

Despite the breadth of literature reviewed, several research gaps were identified. First, most empirical studies on service quality and customer satisfaction focused on hospitality, healthcare, banking, and education, leaving funeral services underrepresented, particularly in developing countries. Second, existing funeral service studies were largely conducted in Western or broader Asian contexts, with very limited research at the local or municipal level in the Philippines. Third, many Philippine-based discussions on funeral services were descriptive or conceptual, lacking systematic measurement using validated frameworks such as SERVQUAL.

Fourth, the literature showed limited integration of Filipino cultural values and religious practices with service quality dimensions in empirical satisfaction studies. Finally, methodologically, most studies relied heavily on quantitative survey designs, with few employing mixed-method approaches that combine numerical satisfaction ratings with qualitative accounts of customers' lived experiences during bereavement. These gaps indicate a lack of localized, culturally grounded, and methodologically integrated research on funeral service satisfaction.

Among the gaps identified, the present study focused specifically on the absence of empirical, local-level, and mixed-method research on customer satisfaction in Philippine funeral services. This study addressed this gap by examining Sobretodo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province, a municipal-level service provider operating within a culturally and emotionally sensitive environment. By applying the SERVQUAL model, the study systematically measured customer satisfaction across the dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility.

Furthermore, the inclusion of qualitative data on customers' lived experiences allowed the study to explain how emotional states, cultural values, and religious practices influenced satisfaction ratings. In doing so, the study filled both the contextual gap (local and Philippine funeral services) and the methodological gap (limited mixed-method approaches), while contributing data-driven insights to service quality literature and local funeral service management.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction, with selected demographic characteristics functioning as intervening variables. Anchored on the SERVQUAL Model of Service Quality and guided by the Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, the framework explains how customers’ perceptions of service performance influence their level of satisfaction, while acknowledging that this relationship may vary across different customer profiles.

The independent variables in the framework are the service quality dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. These dimensions represent customers’ perceptions of how funeral services are delivered by Sobretudo Funeral Home. Reliability refers to the ability of the funeral home to perform promised services accurately and consistently. Responsiveness pertains to the promptness and willingness of staff to assist clients and respond to their needs. Assurance reflects employees’ competence, courtesy, and ability to instill trust and confidence. Empathy denotes the degree of individualized care, compassion, and emotional support extended to bereaved families. Tangibility refers to the physical facilities, equipment, cleanliness, and professional appearance of the funeral home. Collectively, these dimensions describe the quality-of-service performance as experienced by customers.

The directional arrow from the independent variables to the dependent variable indicates a direct causal relationship, wherein perceived service quality influences customer satisfaction. The dependent variable, customer satisfaction, represents the customers’ overall evaluation of their experience after availing of the funeral home’s services. In accordance with Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, customer satisfaction is achieved when perceived service performance meets or exceeds customers’ expectations. In the context of funeral services, this evaluation is particularly sensitive due to the emotional state of customers during bereavement. Thus, improvements or deficiencies in any of the service quality dimensions are expected to lead to corresponding changes in customer satisfaction.

The framework also includes intervening variables, namely age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation, which are positioned between the independent and dependent variables. These intervening variables do not directly cause customer satisfaction but influence the strength and direction of the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. The curved arrow pointing from the intervening variables toward customer satisfaction signifies their moderating or conditioning effect on how service quality is perceived and evaluated.

Specifically, age range may affect expectations and emotional responses to funeral services, as younger and older clients may differ in sensitivity, communication preferences, and service expectations. Gender may influence how empathy, assurance, and responsiveness are perceived, particularly in emotionally charged service encounters. Frequency of patronage reflects prior experience with the funeral home, which shapes expectations and comparison standards when evaluating service quality. Occupation may influence customers’ service expectations, communication styles, and perceptions of professionalism and efficiency. These demographic factors help explain why customers receiving the same level of service quality may report different levels of satisfaction.

Overall, the conceptual framework demonstrates that customer satisfaction is primarily influenced by service quality, but this relationship is conditioned by customer characteristics. The framework guides the study’s data collection and analysis by clarifying which variables are examined and how they interact. Quantitatively, the framework supports the analysis of how service quality dimensions affect customer satisfaction across different demographic groups. Qualitatively, it provides context for interpreting variations in customer experiences and perceptions. In sum, the conceptual framework provides a clear and systematic representation of how service quality and customer characteristics jointly shape customer satisfaction in funeral service delivery.

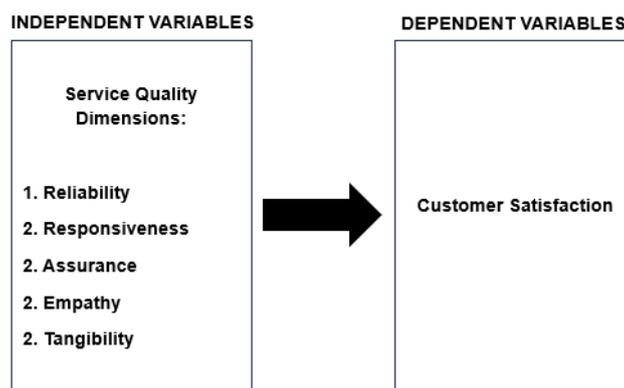


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The quantitative component utilized a descriptive research design to determine the demographic profile of the respondents and to assess their level of satisfaction with funeral services in terms of the SERVQUAL dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. As noted by McCombes (2019), descriptive research is appropriate when the objective is to identify characteristics, trends, and patterns within a population, making it suitable for systematically describing customers' perceptions of service quality and satisfaction. The qualitative component complemented the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into customers' lived experiences and personal evaluations of the funeral services they received.

For the qualitative component, the study adopted a phenomenological approach through open-ended questions and interviews to address the research question: "How do customers describe their experiences with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home?" This qualitative inquiry focused on customers' emotional, cultural, and service-related experiences during bereavement. The phenomenological approach was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to examine how customers constructed meaning from their firsthand experiences with funeral service delivery. By emphasizing lived experiences, the approach allowed the study to capture customers' feelings, expectations, and perceptions of care, professionalism, and compassion during emotionally sensitive situations (Salmons, 2022).

The quantitative phase measured customer satisfaction through a structured survey questionnaire that included items corresponding to the SERVQUAL dimensions. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction regarding the reliability of services, responsiveness of staff, assurance provided by personnel, empathy shown to bereaved families, and the tangibility of facilities and equipment. These survey items operationalized customer satisfaction by quantifying perceptions of service quality. Subsequently, the qualitative interviews and open-ended responses were designed to elaborate on the survey results by exploring why customers rated certain dimensions positively or negatively. The interview guide included questions related to staff behavior, communication, emotional support, respect for cultural and religious practices, timeliness of service, and physical conditions of the funeral home. This alignment ensured that qualitative data directly explained the quantitative findings.

The integration of the mixed-methods design strengthened the alignment between the research questions, variables, and data collection instruments. While the survey identified patterns and levels of customer satisfaction across service quality dimensions, the qualitative data provided contextual explanations for these patterns. Customers shared how their emotional state, cultural values, religious expectations, and prior experiences influenced their perceptions of service quality. Through triangulation, the study linked numerical satisfaction ratings with experiential narratives, resulting in a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of customer satisfaction in funeral services.

In summary, this explicit alignment between the research objectives, variables, survey items, and qualitative inquiry enhanced the coherence, credibility, and validity of the study. By combining quantitative measurement with qualitative explanation, the research provided a holistic assessment of customer satisfaction with Sobretudo Funeral Home. This approach supported the study's objective of generating context-sensitive and practical recommendations for improving funeral service delivery in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Selection Process

The selection of participants in this study followed a purposive criterion sampling technique, ensuring that only individuals with direct, relevant, and first-hand experience with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home were included. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2021) guidance on purposive sampling, this approach was appropriate because the study sought information-rich cases capable of providing meaningful insights into customer satisfaction within an emotionally sensitive service context. The focus on customers who had personally availed of funeral services allowed the researchers to obtain valid evaluations of service quality and lived experiences during bereavement.

Specifically, the respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (a) they had personally availed of the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home; (b) the service availed occurred one year or earlier prior to the conduct of the study, allowing sufficient reflection on the service experience; (c) they were residents of Maasim, Sarangani Province, particularly from areas commonly served by the funeral home; and (d) they were willing and able to provide informed responses regarding their service experience. These criteria ensured that participants had adequate exposure to the funeral home's service processes and could meaningfully assess service quality across the SERVQUAL dimensions.

A total of thirty (30) customers who met the inclusion criteria were selected as respondents for the quantitative component of the study. Their responses provided numerical data on levels of customer satisfaction in terms of reliability, responsiveness,

assurance, empathy, and tangibility. From among these respondents, a subset (three customer-participants) was purposively selected for the qualitative component based on their willingness to share detailed accounts and their ability to articulate their experiences clearly. This allowed the researchers to gather in-depth narratives that explained the satisfaction ratings reflected in the survey results.

This multi-level selection process ensured that both quantitative trends and qualitative explanations were adequately captured. By carefully selecting participants with relevant service experience, the study strengthened the credibility, depth, and contextual validity of its findings. Overall, the purposive criterion sampling technique was appropriate for achieving the objectives of the study and for generating a comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction with funeral services in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Quantitative Respondents

This study involved two groups of individuals: survey respondents for the quantitative phase and research participants for the qualitative phase. This nomenclature follows the recommendation of Morse (1991), who distinguishes respondents as individuals who answer structured instruments and participants as contributors who provide in-depth qualitative insights through narratives and personal accounts.

A total of thirty (30) customers who had previously availed of the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home served as the survey respondents of the study. All invited respondents successfully completed the questionnaire, resulting in a 100% response rate with no attrition or withdrawal.

Purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers intentionally select individuals who can provide relevant and experience-based information related to the research problem (Palinkas, 2020). In this study, the use of purposive sampling ensured that all respondents had sufficient exposure to the funeral service process and were capable of evaluating customer satisfaction across the SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. This approach strengthened the validity and relevance of the quantitative findings by ensuring that responses were grounded in actual service experiences.

From among the survey respondents, a smaller number of research participants were purposively selected for the qualitative phase based on their willingness and ability to articulate their experiences in greater detail. These participants provided richer contextual explanations that complemented the quantitative results and deepened the understanding of customer satisfaction in an emotionally sensitive service setting.

Qualitative Participants

For the qualitative phase, 3 participants were recruited from the pool of survey respondents using purposive criterion sampling. All three agreed to participate, resulting in no withdrawal or non-response. Each participant provided specialized and experience-based insights through semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KII). Below are short descriptive profiles of the participants, as required:

Participant 1 (CP-1), is a 43-year-old male who has availed of Sobretudo Funeral Home's services twice. He shared that there were no promotional materials posted when they decided to avail of the service; instead, they directly visited the office. What impressed him most was the staff's proactiveness. They offered the service inclusions without being asked. However, he emphasized the need for better coordination between staff and family members. Since Sobretudo is the only funeral home in the area, he believes improving coordination would help build greater trust within the community.

Participant 2 (CP-2), is a 46-year-old female who has availed of Sobretudo Funeral Home's services twice. She expressed disappointment over the lack of brochures, flyers, or any online presence from the funeral home. Her dissatisfaction centered on professionalism, particularly during the burial, where the casket barely fit in the grave. She was especially upset that the coffin's paint was still wet upon delivery, despite making full payment. She believed the materials should have been prepared properly, noting that quality should not be sacrificed even if delivery is delayed. She also highlighted the need for price and material transparency, urging the funeral home not to compromise service by using low-quality items. Although she appreciated the affordability and proximity of Sobretudo, she compared it unfavorably to a funeral home in North Cotabato, which provided more attentive service. Ultimately, she emphasized that due to limited options in Maasim, improving quality and trust is crucial.

Participant 3 (CP-3), is a 50-year-old male who has availed of Sobretudo Funeral Home's services three times. He shared concerns about the poor quality of materials used, particularly the coffins, which he felt were not durable despite full payment. He also noted the absence of staff uniforms, adding to a sense of unprofessionalism. While the services may appear presentable at first glance, he observed that the actual materials lacked quality. He expressed disappointment and mentioned that many people who are familiar with good service standards tend to distrust the funeral home. He emphasized the need for greater honesty and professionalism from the staff, pointing out that some appeared more focused on payment collection than service. He believes the lack of competition in the area contributes to complacency and that improvements are necessary to build client trust.

These participants were purposively chosen because they represented a diversity of service experiences and satisfaction levels, allowing the qualitative phase to capture a broad range of customer perceptions regarding service quality, emotional support, and overall satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home, consistent with information-rich sampling strategies (Campbell, 2020).

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument used in this mixed-method study was a researcher-made survey questionnaire, supplemented by a semi-structured interview guide for the qualitative phase. The use of a structured questionnaire is widely recognized as appropriate for descriptive research because it enables systematic and quantifiable assessment of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences across a large group of respondents (Gray & Grove, 2020). Contemporary scholars note that questionnaires are effective instruments for collecting standardized data in business and market studies, particularly when the objective is to measure the extent of practices, behaviors, and perceptions across multiple variables (Molina-Azorín, 2021). In alignment with the objectives of this study, the questionnaire was designed based on the conceptual framework and an extensive review of related literature on customer satisfaction, service quality, the SERVQUAL model, and emotionally sensitive service

industries such as funeral services. The instrument focused on gathering quantitative data regarding customers' levels of satisfaction with funeral services in terms of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, as well as selected demographic characteristics relevant to the study.

The questionnaire consisted of two major parts. Part I captured the respondents' demographic profile, including age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation. These variables were necessary to answer Research Question 1 and to determine whether demographic characteristics influenced the customer satisfaction ratings. Part II measured the level of customer satisfaction with respect to service quality dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Very Low Level, 2 = Low Level, 3 = Moderate Level, 4 = High Level, and 5 = Very High Level. Likert-type scales continue to be one of the most widely accepted tools for measuring subjective evaluations such as extent of practice because they provide clarity, ease of interpretation, and statistical flexibility (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2020).

Before formal administration, the survey instrument underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and content accuracy. Three validators with expertise in business and marketing and research evaluated whether the items represented the constructs of the level of customer satisfaction. A pilot test involving twenty (20) customers from the selected barangays was conducted to assess the instrument's reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient yielded acceptable values across all constructs, indicating strong internal consistency and coherence of items, a standard practice endorsed by recent methodological literature (Boateng, Neilands, Frongillo, Melgar-Quinonez, & Young, 2020). Based on pilot feedback, several items were refined to enhance clarity, reduce redundancy, and improve overall respondent comprehension.

For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to gather deeper insights from purposively selected participants who had previously availed of the funeral home's services. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' lived experiences, particularly their perceptions of service quality, emotional support received, staff behavior, communication, cultural sensitivity, and overall satisfaction during the funeral service process. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to remain aligned with the study objectives while providing flexibility to probe emerging themes and clarify participants' responses as needed. This approach is consistent with contemporary qualitative research practices that emphasize conversational flexibility, participant-centered inquiry, and thematic depth (Salmons, 2023). The interview guide was reviewed by experts to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, ethical appropriateness, and alignment with the research questions.

Taken together, the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview guide constituted a comprehensive and methodologically sound set of instruments for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey captured measurable levels of customer satisfaction across the SERVQUAL dimensions, while the interviews provided contextual explanations of customers' emotional, cultural, and experiential evaluations of funeral services. This integration ensured systematic triangulation of data and enriched interpretation of findings. Overall, these instruments supported the rigor and coherence of the mixed-methods design and facilitated a holistic assessment of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Data Collection

Before the formal data collection, the researchers conducted a pilot test to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and overall functionality of the survey questionnaire. This preliminary phase aimed to detect ambiguous items, assess internal consistency, and verify whether respondents could successfully navigate the instrument without assistance, a practice recommended in contemporary methodological literature (Taherdoost, 2022). Twenty (20) customers from the five barangays in Maasim participated in the pilot test, after which necessary refinements were made to improve item wording and structure.

Following the pilot test, the researchers sought formal approval from the school principal to conduct the study outside school premises, in compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. After securing institutional clearance, permission from the customers was obtained to invite them as potential respondents and participants. This process aligns with current ethical standards that emphasize negotiated entry, transparency, and respect for organizational boundaries (Bhandari, 2023).

The recruitment process began with the researchers approaching eligible customers who met the inclusion criteria. The informed consent process involved the researchers explaining the study's nature, purpose, risks, benefits, and confidentiality measures. The customers were assured that participation was voluntary, refusal carried no consequences, and they could withdraw at any time without justification. Because the study involved adult participants, only standard informed consent was required, but participants who preferred to answer in Bisaya were allowed to do so to ensure comfort and clarity. Written consent was obtained before surveys or interviews were administered, consistent with ethical guidelines on autonomy and participant protection (World Health Organization, 2022).

Moreover, the quantitative phase began with the distribution of the researcher-made survey questionnaire, which contained items relating to demographic profile, and level of customer satisfaction. Each respondent was given approximately sixty (60) minutes to complete the instrument. The researchers organized the distribution process systematically: one researcher handled the introduction and instructions, another monitored the completion of forms, and a third handled retrieval and checking for completeness. Weighted means, frequency counts, and reliability statistics were applied to evaluate responses, ensuring alignment with descriptive research principles and internal consistency standards (Field, 2020).

For the qualitative phase, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with three (3) purposively selected participants whose survey responses reflected rich and meaningful service experiences. These participants were chosen because their responses indicated strong insights into issues related to service quality, emotional support, staff behavior, and overall satisfaction with funeral services. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing the researchers to probe deeper into participants' personal experiences and interpretations of service delivery during emotionally sensitive situations.

Furthermore, each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet and comfortable location preferred by the participants to ensure privacy and emotional ease. With informed consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription and subsequent thematic analysis. Throughout the process, the researchers adhered to best practices in qualitative interviewing, including rapport-building, neutral questioning, and reflexive listening (Salmons, 2023). Data saturation was monitored to ensure that emerging themes were sufficiently developed and that no new substantive information was generated.

All data collected, completed questionnaires, video and audio recordings, signed consent forms, and transcriptions, were stored securely in a password-protected digital folder accessible only to the research team. Hard copies were kept in a locked drawer in the adviser’s office to uphold confidentiality and data security. Digital and physical data will be retained for one year after publication of the study, after which digital files will be permanently deleted and hard copies will be shredded, following ethical data destruction protocols (British Psychological Society, 2021).

Finally, a feedback session was planned in which the researchers summarized key findings and presented them to the participating customers. This step allowed stakeholders to verify interpretations, clarify ambiguities, and benefit directly from the study’s insights. Such feedback loops are recognized as an ethical and practical component of community-engaged research practices (Tracy, 2020). Through these systematic procedures, rooted in ethical conduct, methodological rigor, and contextual sensitivity, the researchers ensured that data collection remained aligned with the research questions and the overall mixed-method research design.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures in this study were systematically aligned with each of the research questions and with the mixed-method research design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive techniques, while the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Integration of findings occurred during interpretation to ensure triangulation, convergence, and comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction of Sobretudo’s service quality in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Analysis for Research Question 1: “What is the demographic profile of the respondent in terms of age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation?” To answer this question, the demographic data were quantified using frequency counts and percentage distributions. These descriptive statistics allowed the researchers to identify patterns in the customers’ characteristics, which serve as the contextual background for understanding variations in the level of customer satisfaction ratings. Descriptive analysis is appropriate for summarizing categorical variables and presenting them in a meaningful structure (Frey, 2022). Results were presented in tables for clarity and comprehension.

Analysis for Research Question 2: “What is the level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of the following service quality dimensions: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, and Tangibility?” To determine the level of customer satisfaction, weighted mean was used as the primary statistical tool because the items in the questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale. The scoring and verbal interpretation followed this scheme:

Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	Very High Level
3.41 – 4.20	High Level
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Level
1.81 – 2.60	Low Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Level

These verbal interpretations were used to evaluate respondents’ level of customer satisfaction with respect to service quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. The use of Likert-based weighted means is consistent with best practices for assessing level of customer satisfaction in business and marketing research (Joshi et al., 2020; Widhiarso & Suprpto, 2022). Reliability of each construct was evaluated through Cronbach’s alpha, with acceptable internal consistency set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$, following Field (2020). The reliability scores from the pilot test guided refinements in the instrument prior to deployment.

Analysis for Research Question 3 (Qualitative): “How do customers describe their experiences with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home? Qualitative data from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2021) six-phase thematic analysis, which is appropriate for identifying patterned meanings across participants’ narratives. The analysis proceeded through the following phases: (1) Familiarization, which involved transcribing the interviews verbatim, repeatedly reading the transcripts, and noting initial impressions related to customers’ experiences of service quality and emotional support during funeral services. (2) Generating Initial Codes, where meaningful data segments were identified and labeled with codes such as “Proactive and Guided Service Delivery”, “Lack of Informational and Promotional Materials”, and “Doubt and Hesitation Due to Poor Physical Presentation.” These codes reflected key aspects of customers’ service experiences.

In (3) Searching for Themes, related codes were clustered into broader themes such as “Compensated Service Strength Amid Tangibility Limitations”. (4) Reviewing Themes involved examining the coherence of each theme across the entire dataset and ensuring that they accurately represented participants’ perspectives. During (5) Defining and Naming Themes, the themes were refined and clearly articulated in relation to customer expectations, emotional needs, and the SERVQUAL dimensions. Finally, (6) Producing the Report involved integrating the thematic findings with quantitative results to explain customers’ levels of satisfaction with funeral services. This thematic approach aligns with phenomenological inquiry, as it allowed participants’ lived experiences of grief and service encounters to guide interpretation.

Because the study employed a mixed-method design, integration occurred during the interpretation stage through triangulation. Quantitative trends, such as varying levels of satisfaction across reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, were compared with qualitative explanations that described why customers felt satisfied or dissatisfied with specific aspects of the service. This process enabled the researchers to explain the meanings behind numerical satisfaction scores and provided contextual accuracy to the findings, consistent with mixed-methods integration practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2022). Both quantitative and qualitative results informed the development of implications and recommendations discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, the outputs and implications related to customer satisfaction with funeral services were grounded in both numerical evidence and thematic insights. To enhance credibility, the interpretations were validated through member checking, wherein selected participants reviewed summaries of the findings to confirm accuracy (Tracy, 2020). In addition, expert review by faculty

advisers was undertaken to ensure clarity, coherence, and academic rigor. This rigorous qualitative analysis process strengthened the trustworthiness of the study and ensured that the findings faithfully represented customers' experiences with Sobretudo Funeral Home.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure that the findings of this mixed-method study were credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable, the researchers employed systematic procedures consistent with contemporary criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative and mixed-methods research. As recommended by Nowell (2021) and Sharma (2020), methodological rigor was upheld by applying transparent, well-documented processes during data collection, analysis, and validation.

Credibility was strengthened by grounding all interpretations in the actual experiences and perspectives of the customers who participated in the survey and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). During interviews, the researchers video and audio-recorded the sessions, took reflexive field notes, and conducted interviews in locations chosen by the participants to ensure comfort and enhance accuracy of responses. These practices align with the guidance of Castillo-Montoya (2021), who emphasized prolonged engagement, rapport-building, and contextual familiarity as central to trustworthy qualitative inquiry. Additionally, member checking was conducted by returning a summary of the thematic interpretations to the interview participants for verification, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or adjust the meanings attributed to their statements.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear and consistent documentation of all research activities, including the development of instruments, pilot testing, data collection, transcription, and analysis. An audit trail was created, detailing methodological decisions and changes during the research process, consistent with the recommendations of Korstjens and Moser (2021). Peer debriefing with the research adviser and panel experts from Colon National High School further contributed to dependability by allowing external evaluation of the logic, accuracy, and coherence of the researchers' analytic decisions.

Confirmability was achieved by practicing reflexivity throughout the research process. The researchers consciously bracketed their personal expectations and assumptions regarding customer satisfaction and service quality in funeral services to ensure that the findings emerged from the participants' accounts rather than from researcher bias. Given the emotionally sensitive nature of funeral services, particular care was taken to separate personal sympathies and value judgments from analytic interpretation. Researcher journals and reflexive memos were maintained to document evolving insights, potential biases, and analytical decisions during data collection and analysis. This practice aligns with the guidelines of Nowell and Albrecht (2020), who emphasize reflexive transparency as a key contributor to confirmability in qualitative research. To further strengthen confirmability, interview recordings, verbatim transcripts, coding matrices, and theme development records were systematically retained as part of a comprehensive audit trail. These materials were made available for external review to ensure that conclusions could be traced directly back to the original data.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, the characteristics of the participants, and the nature of funeral service delivery within the local setting. The study carefully described the locale, the cultural and religious environment, and the service conditions under which customers experienced the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home. Detailed accounts of participants' demographic profiles and their perceptions of service quality across the SERVQUAL dimensions were also presented to contextualize the findings. By offering such contextual information, readers are enabled to assess the extent to which the findings may be applicable to similar funeral service settings or other emotionally sensitive service environments. As emphasized by Lincoln and Guba's contemporary interpreters, thick description allows readers to make informed judgments about the relevance and applicability of research findings to their own contexts (Pandey & Patnaik, 2021). Through this approach, the study supports transferability while recognizing that interpretations may vary depending on cultural, social, and organizational contexts.

Finally, triangulation supported the overall trustworthiness of the study. This included methodological triangulation by combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, investigator triangulation through collaborative team analysis, and data triangulation by comparing information from diverse participants across different barangays in Maasim. These triangulation strategies follow the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2021) for enhancing the robustness and validity of mixed-method research.

Through these sustained efforts, credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and triangulation, the researchers ensured that the study's results are trustworthy, ethically grounded, and reflective of the true experiences of local rice sellers in Maasim.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured that all ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study, following the guidelines set by Colon National High School, and contemporary ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical safeguards were implemented to prevent any form of exploitation, coercion, or harm, and to guarantee that respondents and key informants were treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. Special attention was given to the confidentiality, privacy, and autonomy of all individuals participating in the study on the level of customer satisfaction with respect to the service quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Informed Consent

Informed consent served as the cornerstone of ethical practice in this study. Before any survey or interview was conducted, the researchers provided a clear explanation of the study's purpose, scope, procedures, risks, benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. Consent was obtained in writing from each adult respondent and key informant, in accordance with ethical requirements for studies involving human participants. The researchers also clarified that participants could choose to withdraw at any point without consequence. For the qualitative phase, additional consent for video and audio recording was obtained separately

to ensure participants' comfort and transparency. This process safeguarded participant autonomy and promoted trust throughout the data collection.

Data Privacy and Confidentiality

The study adhered to the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to ensure responsible handling of personal information. All respondents were informed that their identities would remain anonymous and that their responses would be reported only in aggregate or coded form. Survey questionnaires, interview transcripts, and consent forms were stored securely, with digital files encrypted and physical documents kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the research team. Upon completion of the study and publication of the findings, all data will be destroyed following ethical disposal procedures, digital files will be permanently deleted, and hard copies will be shredded, to prevent unauthorized access or misuse of information.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study was entirely voluntary. No respondent was compelled to participate, and declining or withdrawing from the study did not entail penalties or loss of benefits. This assurance was emphasized during the informed consent process to ensure that willingness, not obligation, guided every participant's decision. Voluntary participation protected the integrity of the data and upheld the ethical principle of respect for persons.

Gender Sensitivity

The researchers maintained gender-sensitive practices throughout the study by ensuring that questions, interactions, and analyses were free from bias and respectful of all gender identities. Survey items and interview questions were worded in a gender-neutral manner to avoid stereotyping or exclusion. Additionally, the researchers acknowledged that lived experiences may differ across genders; therefore, all perspectives, regardless of gender, were valued equally and analyzed with fairness and inclusivity.

Cultural Sensitivity

Given that the study was conducted in Maasim, Sarangani Province, an area characterized by cultural diversity, the researchers were mindful of using respectful, non-discriminatory, and culturally appropriate language in the survey, interviews, and all field interactions. Participants were allowed to respond in Bisaya or English according to their comfort, ensuring inclusivity and reducing linguistic barriers. The researchers avoided questions or statements that might demean cultural beliefs or practices, reflecting a commitment to ethical tourism research, where respect for local cultures and communities is essential.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the data gathered to examine customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The findings were derived from both quantitative data collected through a structured survey questionnaire and qualitative data obtained from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with selected customers who had previously availed of the funeral home's services. The quantitative results include the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation, as well as their levels of satisfaction across the SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility.

Meanwhile, the qualitative findings provide in-depth explanations of customers' lived experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses to funeral service delivery, highlighting factors that influenced their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. These narratives offer contextual insights into service quality, staff behavior, emotional support, communication, cultural sensitivity, and physical facilities during bereavement. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are systematically presented, analyzed, and discussed in direct relation to the research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. This integrated presentation allows for a comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction with funeral services and explains how service quality dimensions shape customers' experiences in an emotionally sensitive service context.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the quantitative results of the study gathered from the survey questionnaires administered to customers who had previously availed of the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home. It discusses the demographic profile of the respondents, including age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation, as well as their levels of satisfaction with funeral services across the SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. The data are presented in tabular form and analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean to describe patterns and trends in customer satisfaction. Each result is interpreted and supported with recent related literature to strengthen the discussion and situate the findings within existing service quality research. Through this analysis, the study provides empirical evidence that may serve as a basis for service improvement initiatives and customer-centered management practices in funeral service delivery.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This part presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age range, frequency of patronage, and occupation, as these characteristics are relevant in understanding variations in customers' perceptions and levels of satisfaction with funeral services. These demographic factors may influence expectations, emotional responses, and evaluations of service quality across the SERVQUAL dimensions. The complete results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

VARIABLES	Frequency	Percentage
18-22 Years Old	2	6.67%
23-27 Years Old	2	6.67%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the thirty (30) respondents in terms of age range, gender, frequency of patronage, and occupation. These variables are relevant intervening factors that help explain variations in customers' expectations, emotional responses, and satisfaction with funeral services.

In terms of age range, the majority of respondents were 40 years old and above (63.33%), followed by those aged 37–40 years (20.00%), while younger age groups were minimally represented. This suggests that funeral service utilization and evaluation are more prevalent among older individuals, who are more likely to be family decision-makers during bereavement. Similar findings were reported by Cheng et al. (2021) and Rather et al. (2022), who noted that older customers tend to place greater importance on reliability, assurance, and empathy in high-contact services. In contrast, studies in digital and retail services often report higher participation from younger age groups (Nguyen et al., 2023), indicating that age distribution varies depending on service context. The dominance of older respondents in this study reflects the nature of funeral services as life-event-driven and responsibility-oriented rather than consumption-driven.

With respect to gender, the respondents were predominantly female (80.00%), while males accounted for only 20.00%. This finding aligns with studies suggesting that women are more involved in caregiving, emotional labor, and coordination of family-related services, including funeral arrangements (Ladhari, 2020). Research by Wirtz, Patterson, Kunz, Gruber, Lu, Paluch, & Martins (2021) further explains that female customers tend to be more expressive in evaluating service experiences and are more sensitive to empathy and responsiveness. However, some studies in financial and healthcare services report relatively balanced gender participation (Rather et al., 2022), suggesting that gender dominance in this study may be influenced by cultural roles in Filipino families. This result highlights the importance of emotionally attuned service delivery, given the strong female representation among customers.

In terms of frequency of patronage, the largest proportion of respondents indicated that they rarely (36.67%) avail of funeral services, followed by those who avail once a year (26.67%). This pattern is expected given that funeral services are non-routine and event-driven, unlike hospitality or retail services. Similar observations were reported by Walter (2020) and Lim and Teo (2022), who emphasized that funeral services are typically evaluated based on a single or limited experience, making first impressions and service consistency crucial. This contrasts with studies in hospitality where repeat patronage strongly influences satisfaction ratings (Cheng et al., 2021). The infrequent nature of patronage underscores the need for funeral homes to deliver high-quality service consistently, as customers often rely on one-time experiences when forming satisfaction judgments.

Regarding occupation, most respondents were self-employed (46.67%), followed by the unemployed (30.00%) and employed (23.33%) groups. This distribution suggests that respondents may vary in income stability, time availability, and service expectations. Studies by Nguyen et al. (2023) indicate that occupation influences customers' expectations of efficiency, communication clarity, and value-for-money in service encounters. In the context of funeral services, self-employed and unemployed individuals may place greater emphasis on transparency, assurance, and cost-related communication. This finding helps explain why assurance and empathy often emerge as critical service quality dimensions in emotionally sensitive services. In summary, the demographic profile indicates that customer satisfaction with funeral services is shaped by age-related responsibility, gendered emotional roles, infrequent service exposure, and occupational context. These factors provide important context for interpreting satisfaction levels across the SERVQUAL dimensions.

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The demographic findings suggest that funeral service improvement initiatives may prioritize empathetic communication, reassurance, and clear guidance, particularly for older and female customers who are more likely to manage funeral arrangements. Staff training programs may emphasize emotional intelligence, compassionate interaction, and sensitivity to family dynamics, as supported by Ladhari (2020). Given the infrequent patronage pattern, funeral homes may focus on delivering consistent, error-free, and dignified service during every engagement, as customers may have limited prior experience and high emotional vulnerability. Clear explanations of procedures, costs, and timelines may help address the needs of customers from varied occupational backgrounds.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a management perspective, the findings highlight the importance of adopting customer-centered practices that recognize demographic diversity. Management may consider tailoring communication strategies to suit older clients, such as providing step-by-step guidance and personal consultations. Given the strong female representation, incorporating feedback mechanisms that allow emotional expression and narrative feedback may enhance satisfaction assessment. Transparent service packages and flexible arrangements may also support customers with varying economic capacities. Ultimately, understanding customer demographics enables funeral home managers to align service delivery with clients' emotional, cultural, and practical needs, thereby strengthening trust, satisfaction, and community reputation.

Level of Customer Satisfaction

This section presents the results on the level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The findings presented in Tables 2–7 provide an overall assessment of customers' satisfaction across the service quality dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. These results indicate how effectively the funeral home's services met customers' expectations during emotionally sensitive service encounters. The quantitative findings serve as the basis for evaluating strengths and areas for improvement in service delivery.

Table 2

Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Reliability

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. The funeral home ensured that all arrangements for the wake service were handled as promised without any delays or issues.	4.13	High Level
2. The funeral service was conducted on time and in a manner that met the agreed-upon expectations.	4.27	Very High Level
3. The prices of the products and services were clearly communicated, and there were no unexpected additional charges.	3.80	High Level
4. The employees consistently delivered the services in a dependable and professional manner.	3.97	High Level
5. The advertised promotions and packages were accurately provided as described without discrepancies.	4.13	High Level
Overall Mean	4.06	High Level

on with Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of reliability, reflecting customers' perceptions of the funeral home's ability to deliver promised services accurately, consistently, and dependably. The overall mean of 4.06, described as a High Level of satisfaction, indicates that customers generally perceive the funeral home as reliable in fulfilling service commitments during emotionally sensitive situations.

Among the indicators, the highest-rated item was "The funeral service was conducted on time and in a manner that met the agreed-upon expectations" with a mean of 4.27 (Very High Level). This result highlights the importance of timeliness and adherence to agreed arrangements in funeral services, where delays can intensify emotional distress. Similar findings were reported by Lim and Teo (2022) and Rather et al. (2022), who found that punctuality and consistency are among the strongest predictors of customer satisfaction in high-contact and emotionally sensitive service industries. These studies explain that reliability becomes a foundation of trust, particularly when customers are experiencing grief and vulnerability.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was "The prices of the products and services were clearly communicated, and there were no unexpected additional charges" with a mean of 3.80 (High Level). Although still positively rated, this result suggests that price transparency may be an area requiring further attention. This finding aligns with Nguyen et al. (2023), who noted that customers in service industries often express lower satisfaction when cost-related information is perceived as unclear or insufficient, even when service execution is strong. Conversely, some studies in healthcare services report higher satisfaction with pricing transparency when standardized packages are clearly explained in advance (Cheng et al., 2021), indicating that clear communication can mitigate concerns about cost.

The remaining indicators, handling arrangements as promised ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), consistent and professional service delivery ($\bar{x} = 3.97$), and accuracy of advertised packages ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), all received High Level satisfaction ratings. These results are consistent with the findings of Ladhari (2020), who emphasized that dependable performance and accuracy in service promises enhance customers' sense of security and confidence. In funeral services, where families rely heavily on service providers to manage complex arrangements, dependable execution becomes a critical element of perceived quality.

In conclusion, the results indicate that reliability is a strong dimension of service quality at Sobretudo Funeral Home, particularly in terms of timeliness and fulfillment of service commitments. However, the relatively lower rating for price clarity suggests a need for improved communication strategies. These findings support service quality theory, which posits that while operational reliability builds trust, transparency further strengthens long-term satisfaction (Wirtz et al., 2021).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The findings suggest that Sobretudo Funeral Home may continue to prioritize timely and dependable service delivery, as this aspect received the highest satisfaction ratings and strongly influences customer trust. To further enhance reliability, management may consider implementing standardized service timelines and internal monitoring systems to ensure consistency across all service engagements. Additionally, improving price transparency through clearer explanations of service packages, written cost breakdowns, and pre-service consultations may help address the lowest-rated indicator.

These initiatives may reduce uncertainty and enhance customers' sense of control during emotionally difficult periods. Regular staff evaluations and service audits may also help ensure that promised services are delivered accurately and consistently. Establishing feedback mechanisms may allow customers to immediately express concerns or clarify expectations. Such continuous improvement efforts can contribute to higher service quality and sustained customer confidence.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the results highlight the importance of aligning operational reliability with clear and compassionate communication. Management may train staff to proactively explain pricing details and confirm service arrangements in a sensitive yet transparent manner. Providing written agreements or checklists may further reinforce customer confidence and reduce misunderstandings. By integrating reliability with transparency and empathy, funeral home managers may strengthen customer satisfaction, trust, and long-term community reputation.

Encouraging staff to check regularly on clients' understanding may further enhance perceived care and attentiveness. Customer-centered policies that prioritize emotional support alongside procedural accuracy may improve overall service experiences. Ultimately, such practices may help build lasting relationships with clients and reinforce the funeral home's role as a trusted community service provider.

Table 3

Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Responsiveness

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. The staff promptly addressed any questions or concerns about the wake service arrangements.	4.07	High Level
2. The funeral home staff were quick to respond to any last-minute changes or requests during the funeral service.	4.10	High Level
3. The staff provided timely and clear answers to all inquiries regarding the pricing of products and services.	4.00	High Level
4. The employees were always available and ready to help regardless of the needs.	4.13	High Level
5. The funeral home staff were proactive in explaining the available promotions and packages, and responsive to any questions I had.	4.20	High Level
Overall Mean	4.10	High Level

satisfaction with Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of the ability of staff to promptly assist customers and respond to their needs during funeral service arrangements. The overall mean of 4.10, interpreted as a High Level of satisfaction, indicates that customers generally perceive the funeral home staff as attentive, available, and responsive in an emotionally sensitive service environment.

The highest-rated indicator was “The funeral home staff were proactive in explaining the available promotions and packages, and responsive to any questions I had” with a mean of 4.20 (High Level). This result highlights the value of proactive communication, especially in funeral services where customers may feel overwhelmed and uncertain about available options. Similar findings were reported by Rather et al. (2022) and Lim and Teo (2022), who found that proactive explanations and anticipatory assistance significantly enhance customer satisfaction and trust in high-contact and emotionally sensitive services. These studies explain that when staff initiate information sharing rather than waiting for questions, customers experience reduced stress and greater confidence in decision-making.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “The staff provided timely and clear answers to all inquiries regarding the pricing of products and services” with a mean of 4.00 (High Level). Although still positively rated, this suggests that responsiveness related to pricing inquiries may be comparatively weaker than other aspects of service. This finding is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2023), who observed that customers often express lower satisfaction when financial discussions are perceived as complex, unclear, or emotionally uncomfortable. However, this result contrasts with findings in hospitality and retail studies where pricing responsiveness tends to receive higher ratings due to standardized pricing systems (Cheng et al., 2021). This inconsistency suggests that the emotionally sensitive nature of funeral services may affect how pricing information is communicated and received.

The remaining indicators, promptly addressing questions ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), responding quickly to last-minute changes ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), and staff availability regardless of needs ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), all received High Level satisfaction ratings. These results align with Ladhari (2020), who emphasized that responsiveness provides emotional reassurance and strengthens trust in services involving stress, grief, or vulnerability. In the context of funeral services, the ability to respond quickly to sudden changes or urgent requests is especially critical, as circumstances are often unpredictable and time-sensitive.

Indeed, the findings indicate that responsiveness is a strong dimension of service quality at Sobretudo Funeral Home, particularly in terms of staff availability and proactive communication. Nevertheless, the slightly lower rating for responsiveness in pricing-related inquiries suggests a need for clearer, more compassionate financial communication. These findings support service quality theory, which asserts that responsiveness enhances customer satisfaction when combined with clarity, empathy, and assurance (Wirtz et al., 2021).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The results suggest that Sobretudo Funeral Home may continue strengthening proactive and timely communication, as this aspect received the highest satisfaction ratings. Service improvement initiatives may include regular staff training on anticipatory communication and handling last-minute service adjustments efficiently. To address the lower-rated pricing responsiveness, management may introduce clearer pricing guides, written service breakdowns, or pre-arrangement consultations to help customers better understand costs. Improving how pricing information is communicated, both promptly and compassionately, may further enhance customers' sense of trust and comfort during emotionally challenging moments.

Also, implementing communication checklists may help staff ensure that all essential information is consistently conveyed. Periodic review of customer feedback may identify specific communication gaps that need improvement. These initiatives may lead to more confident and less stressful decision-making for bereaved families.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the findings highlight the importance of balancing speed, clarity, and emotional sensitivity in service interactions. Management may encourage staff to routinely check for customer understanding and invite questions, especially regarding service options and costs. Establishing standard communication protocols for pricing discussions may help ensure consistency and reduce customer uncertainty. By fostering a culture of attentiveness, transparency, and empathy, funeral home management may strengthen customer satisfaction, reinforce trust, and enhance the organization’s reputation within the community.

Furthermore, customer-centered training programs may further equip staff to respond appropriately to emotional cues and concerns. Management may also consider incorporating customer satisfaction indicators into performance evaluations. Such practices may support continuous service improvement and long-term client relationships.

Table 4

Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Assurance

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. The staff made me feel confident that the wake service was handled with professionalism and care.	4.17	High Level
2. I felt reassured by the staff’s knowledge and ability to manage the funeral service with dignity and respect.	4.30	Very High Level
3. The staff clearly explained the pricing of products and services, making me feel secure about the fairness of the charges.	4.07	High Level
4. The staff displayed expertise and inspired trust through their courteous and professional behavior.	4.20	High Level
5. The staff provided clear and reliable information about promotions and packages, giving me confidence in the choices available.	4.20	High Level
Overall Mean	4.19	High Level

Sobretodo Funeral Home in terms of assurance, which refers to the knowledge, competence, courtesy, and professionalism of staff in instilling trust and confidence among customers. The overall mean of 4.19, interpreted as a High Level of satisfaction, indicates that customers generally feel secure and confident in the funeral home’s ability to deliver services with dignity and professionalism during emotionally sensitive moments.

The highest-rated indicator was “I felt reassured by the staff’s knowledge and ability to manage the funeral service with dignity and respect” with a mean of 4.30 (Very High Level). This result underscores the critical role of staff competence and professionalism in funeral services, where customers are emotionally vulnerable and rely heavily on service providers for guidance and reassurance. Similar findings were reported by Ladhari (2020) and Rather et al. (2022), who emphasized that assurance is a key determinant of trust and emotional comfort in high-contact and emotionally charged service environments. These studies explain that knowledgeable and confident staff help reduce anxiety and foster a sense of security among customers.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “The staff clearly explained the pricing of products and services, making me feel secure about the fairness of the charges” with a mean of 4.07 (High Level). Although still positively evaluated, this suggests that assurance related to pricing transparency is comparatively less strong than assurance related to staff competence and behavior. This finding aligns with Nguyen et al. (2023), who observed that customers often feel less assured when pricing information is complex or emotionally difficult to discuss, even when overall service quality is high. However, this result contrasts with studies in healthcare settings where pricing assurance tends to score higher due to standardized billing systems (Cheng et al., 2021), suggesting that contextual factors influence how assurance is perceived.

The remaining indicators, feeling confident about service handling ($\bar{x} = 4.17$), trust inspired by courteous behavior ($\bar{x} = 4.20$), and receiving reliable information about promotions and packages ($\bar{x} = 4.20$), all received High Level satisfaction ratings. These findings are consistent with Wirtz et al. (2021), who emphasized that professional conduct and clear communication are essential in building customer trust and credibility in service organizations. In the context of funeral services, such behaviors contribute significantly to customers’ sense of dignity and respect.

Therefore, the results indicate that assurance is one of the strongest service quality dimensions at Sobretodo Funeral Home, particularly in terms of staff competence, professionalism, and respectful service delivery. However, the slightly lower rating for pricing-related assurance suggests a potential area for improvement. These findings support service quality theory, which posits that assurance strengthens customer satisfaction when combined with transparency and empathy (Ladhari, 2020).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The findings suggest that Sobretodo Funeral Home may continue investing in staff training and professional development, as assurance-related indicators received consistently high ratings. Training programs may focus on reinforcing technical competence, ethical conduct, and respectful communication during funeral arrangements. To further enhance assurance, management may improve pricing communication practices by providing clearer explanations, written cost breakdowns, and advance discussions of service packages. These initiatives may help customers feel more secure and confident about both service quality and financial fairness. Moreover, regular refresher trainings may help ensure that professional standards are consistently upheld across all service encounters.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the results highlight the importance of building trust through competence, courtesy, and transparency. Management may encourage staff to proactively reassure clients by explaining procedures, confirming understanding, and demonstrating empathy throughout the service process. Standardizing communication protocols for pricing and service options may further strengthen perceived assurance. By integrating professionalism with compassionate interaction, funeral home managers may enhance customer satisfaction, reinforce trust, and sustain a positive reputation within the community.

Table 5

Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Empathy

Table 5 presents the level of customer satisfaction with Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of empathy, which refers to the ability of staff to provide caring, individualized, and emotionally sensitive service to bereaved families. The overall mean of 4.09, interpreted as a High Level of satisfaction, indicates that customers generally perceived the funeral home staff as compassionate and attentive to their emotional needs during a difficult period.

The highest-rated indicator was “The funeral home staff showed genuine concern and understanding for my emotional needs during the wake service” with a mean of 4.17 (High Level). This finding highlights the importance of genuine emotional support in funeral services, where customers are particularly vulnerable. Similar results were reported by Ladhari (2020) and Lim and Teo (2022), who found that empathy is a dominant predictor of customer satisfaction in emotionally sensitive service industries such as healthcare and funeral services. These studies explain that when staff demonstrate sincere concern and understanding, customers feel emotionally validated, which enhances overall satisfaction.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “The pricing of the products and services was explained with empathy, ensuring I felt no undue pressure or discomfort” with a mean of 3.97 (High Level). Although still positively rated, this suggests that empathy during pricing discussions is comparatively less strong than empathy shown in emotional support and interaction. This finding aligns with Nguyen et al. (2023), who noted that customers often experience discomfort when financial matters are discussed during emotionally charged situations, even when staff attempt to be considerate. However, this result contrasts with some healthcare studies where empathetic financial counseling led to higher satisfaction ratings (Cheng et al., 2021), indicating that further refinement in communication strategies may improve this aspect.

The remaining indicators, compassionate and sensitive service delivery ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), empathetic listening and concern ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), and respectful presentation of promotional materials ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), all received High Level satisfaction ratings. These findings are consistent with Rather et al. (2022), who emphasized that empathy strengthens emotional comfort and trust, especially in services that involve stress, grief, or personal loss. In funeral services, empathetic listening and respectful communication help reduce anxiety and promote a sense of dignity for bereaved families.

In summary, the findings indicate that empathy is a strong service quality dimension at Sobretudo Funeral Home, particularly in terms of emotional understanding and compassionate interaction. However, the slightly lower rating for empathetic pricing explanations suggests an area for improvement. These results support service quality theory, which posits that empathy enhances satisfaction when emotional care is integrated with clear, respectful communication (Wirtz et al., 2021).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The results suggest that Sobretudo Funeral Home may continue to emphasize emotional intelligence and compassionate service delivery among its staff. Regular training on grief sensitivity, active listening, and emotional support may further strengthen empathy-related performance. To address the lower-rated pricing indicator, management may consider introducing structured yet compassionate approaches to discussing costs, such as private consultations, simplified explanations, or written summaries presented with sensitivity. These initiatives may help ensure that financial discussions do not undermine the emotional care provided to customers.

Moreover, providing staff with clear guidelines on empathetic communication during financial discussions may improve consistency in service delivery. Allowing customers adequate time to process information and ask questions may further reduce emotional pressure. Such practices may enhance overall satisfaction by reinforcing the balance between compassion and transparency.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the findings highlight the need to integrate empathy into all aspects of service interaction, including administrative and financial processes. Management may encourage staff to adopt personalized communication styles that acknowledge customers' emotional states while providing necessary information. Feedback mechanisms that allow customers to express emotional concerns may also support continuous improvement. By fostering a culture of compassion, understanding, and respect, funeral home management may enhance customer satisfaction, reinforce trust, and strengthen long-term relationships within the community. Furthermore, regular review of customer feedback can help identify specific areas where empathetic practices can be improved. Recognizing and rewarding staff who demonstrate exemplary empathy

may further reinforce desired service behaviors. Such management practices may contribute to a more supportive service environment for both customers and employees.

Table 6

Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Tangibility

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. The wake service venue was clean, well-maintained, and appropriately set up to provide a comforting environment.	4.07	High Level
2. The funeral service arrangements, such as seating, décor, and equipment, were visually appealing and professionally presented.	4.20	High Level
3. The products offered (e.g., caskets, urns) were of high quality and visually met my expectations for the price.	3.19	High Level
4. The employees were well-groomed, professionally dressed, and presented themselves in a manner that inspired confidence.	3.33	Moderate Level
5. The promotional materials and package information (e.g., brochures, flyers, website) were visually clear, professional, and easy to understand.	3.23	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.75	High Level

Level of customer satisfaction with Sobretudo Funeral Home in terms of appearance of personnel, and visual presentation of service-related materials. The overall mean of 3.75, interpreted as a High Level of satisfaction, indicates that customers generally perceived the funeral home’s physical environment and tangible elements as acceptable and supportive of the service experience, though with noticeable variations across specific indicators.

The highest-rated indicator was “The funeral service arrangements, such as seating, décor, and equipment, were visually appealing and professionally presented” with a mean of 4.20 (High Level). This finding suggests that customers value well-organized and aesthetically appropriate physical arrangements, particularly during wake services where the environment contributes to emotional comfort. Similar findings were reported by Cheng et al. (2021) and Lim and Teo (2022), who emphasized that well-maintained and thoughtfully arranged service environments enhance customer perceptions of professionalism and respect in high-contact services. In funeral services, visually orderly and dignified settings help create a calming atmosphere for bereaved families.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator was “The promotional materials and package information (e.g., brochures, flyers, website) were visually clear, professional, and easy to understand” with a mean of 3.23 (Moderate Level). This result indicates that while core service facilities were satisfactory, supporting visual communication materials were perceived as less effective. This finding aligns with Nguyen et al. (2023), who noted that service organizations often prioritize physical service delivery over marketing and informational materials, leading to lower satisfaction in tangibility-related communication tools. However, this result contrasts with hospitality studies where promotional materials are often rated highly due to strong branding and digital presence (Wirtz et al., 2021), highlighting a contextual difference between funeral services and commercial hospitality sectors.

Another relatively lower-rated indicator was “The employees were well-groomed, professionally dressed, and presented themselves in a manner that inspired confidence” with a mean of 3.33 (Moderate Level). Although still positive, this suggests that staff appearance may not consistently meet customer expectations. Ladhari (2020) explains that in emotionally sensitive services, customers interpret staff appearance as a symbol of professionalism and respect, which can influence confidence and trust. The variation in ratings may reflect inconsistencies in uniform standards or grooming practices during service delivery.

The remaining indicators, cleanliness and maintenance of the venue ($\bar{x} = 4.07$) and perceived quality of products ($\bar{x} = 3.19$)—received High Level satisfaction ratings, though the latter was closer to the lower end. This suggests that while physical facilities are generally satisfactory, product aesthetics and perceived value may require enhancement. Overall, the findings indicate that tangibility is the weakest yet still acceptable service quality dimension compared to reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These results support service quality theory, which posits that tangibles play a supportive role in emotionally sensitive services but must still align with expectations of dignity and professionalism (Rather et al., 2022).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The findings suggest that Sobretudo Funeral Home may maintain its strengths in venue cleanliness and professional service arrangements, as these received the highest satisfaction ratings. To improve lower-rated aspects, management may prioritize upgrading promotional and informational materials, ensuring that brochures, flyers, and digital content are visually clear, professional, and easy to understand. Standardizing staff uniforms and grooming guidelines may also enhance consistency in professional appearance. Improving the visual presentation and perceived quality of funeral products may further strengthen customers’ overall impressions of tangible service quality.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the results highlight the importance of viewing tangibility not merely as aesthetics but as part of the overall emotional experience. Management may consider conducting regular facility audits and gathering customer feedback on physical aspects of service delivery. Investing in professional branding and visual communication may help customers make informed decisions with less stress. By aligning physical environment, staff appearance, and informational materials with customers’ emotional and cultural expectations, funeral home management may enhance satisfaction, trust, and perceived service value.

Table 7

Summary of the Level of Customer Satisfaction

Variables	Mean	Description
Reliability	4.06	High Level
Responsiveness	4.10	High Level
Assurance	4.19	High Level
Empathy	4.09	High Level
Tangibility	3.75	High Level

Table 7 summarizes the overall level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home across the five SERVQUAL dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. The overall mean of 4.04, interpreted as a High Level of customer satisfaction, indicates that customers generally perceived the funeral home's services as meeting their expectations during emotionally sensitive service encounters. This finding suggests that the organization demonstrates consistent service quality across both functional and emotional aspects of service delivery.

Among the dimensions, assurance obtained the highest mean score (4.19), followed closely by responsiveness (4.10) and empathy (4.09). This pattern highlights that customers place the greatest value on staff competence, professionalism, trustworthiness, and emotional reassurance when availing of funeral services. Similar findings were reported by Ladhari (2020) and Rather et al. (2022), who found that assurance and empathy are the strongest predictors of customer satisfaction in high-contact and emotionally sensitive services such as healthcare and funeral care. These studies explain that customers experiencing grief prioritize feeling safe, respected, and guided by knowledgeable service providers.

In contrast, tangibility recorded the lowest mean score (3.75), although it was still described as a High Level of satisfaction. This result indicates that while customers were generally satisfied with the physical facilities, staff appearance, and visual materials, these aspects were perceived as less impactful compared to interpersonal and emotional service dimensions. This finding aligns with Lim and Teo (2022), who observed that in funeral services, intangible elements such as compassion, assurance, and responsiveness outweigh physical attributes in shaping customer satisfaction. However, this contrasts with hospitality and retail studies where tangibility often emerges as a dominant determinant of satisfaction due to strong emphasis on aesthetics and branding (Wirtz et al., 2021). The difference suggests that service context significantly influences the relative importance of SERVQUAL dimensions.

The relatively strong performance of reliability (4.06) further reinforces the importance of dependable and accurate service delivery in funeral services. Studies by Cheng et al. (2021) emphasize that reliability forms the foundation of trust, especially in services involving time-sensitive and emotionally charged events. When combined with assurance and empathy, reliable service execution enhances customers' overall perception of quality and professionalism.

Thus, the results indicate that customer satisfaction with Sobretudo Funeral Home is driven primarily by human-centered service qualities, trust, responsiveness, and compassion, rather than purely physical or aesthetic factors. This supports contemporary service quality theory, which posits that emotional and relational dimensions are critical in services involving vulnerability and personal loss (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Implications for Service Improvement Initiatives

The findings suggest that Sobretudo Funeral Home may continue strengthening its assurance-, responsiveness-, and empathy-related practices, as these dimensions received the highest satisfaction ratings and are most influential in shaping customer experiences. Continuous training programs focused on professional competence, ethical conduct, emotional intelligence, and grief-sensitive communication may further enhance these strengths. At the same time, targeted improvements in tangibility, such as upgrading promotional materials, standardizing staff appearance, and enhancing the visual presentation of facilities and products, may help elevate the lowest-rated dimension. These initiatives may contribute to a more balanced and consistently high service quality experience.

Implications for Customer-Centered Management Practices

From a customer-centered management perspective, the results highlight the importance of prioritizing emotional care and trust-building alongside operational efficiency. Management may adopt service policies that emphasize personalized attention, proactive communication, and reassurance throughout the funeral service process. Regular customer feedback mechanisms may help identify specific areas for improvement, particularly in physical and informational aspects of service delivery. By aligning management practices with customers' emotional, cultural, and practical needs, funeral home administrators may strengthen customer satisfaction, foster long-term trust, and enhance the organization's reputation within the community.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study derived from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with selected customers who had previously availed of the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province. The qualitative phase was designed to complement and deepen the quantitative results by capturing customers' lived experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses to funeral service delivery, insights that could not be fully explained through survey data alone.

Through semi-structured interviews, the participants provided detailed narratives describing their experiences with service quality, staff behavior, emotional support, communication, cultural sensitivity, and overall satisfaction during funeral arrangements. These narratives highlighted how customers interpreted the reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility of services in emotionally sensitive situations. Thematic analysis was employed to organize interview responses into meaningful themes that reflected shared patterns as well as variations in customer experiences.

These qualitative insights enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings by explaining why certain service quality dimensions were rated more positively than others and how emotional, cultural, and situational factors shaped customers' evaluations. By integrating customers' voices with numerical satisfaction ratings, the qualitative findings strengthened the overall conclusions of the study and provided a more comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction with funeral services in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

How do customers describe their experiences with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home?

This section presents the qualitative findings on customers’ lived experiences with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home, as derived from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The qualitative data were analyzed using a systematic thematic analysis, involving careful coding, comparison of responses, and clustering of related ideas to ensure rigor, credibility, and transparency in interpretation. Interview transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and segmented into meaningful units based on customers’ perceptions of service quality, particularly in relation to service delivery, communication, and physical presentation of services.

After identifying initial codes, the researchers formulated core ideas by condensing participants’ statements into concise meanings while preserving the essence of their lived experiences. These core ideas were then subjected to cross-case analysis, allowing similar responses to be grouped into broader themes. This analytical process enabled the identification of recurring patterns and shared customer perceptions regarding strengths and weaknesses in funeral service delivery, especially within an emotionally sensitive context.

The qualitative results revealed a dominant theme cluster identified as “**Compensated Service Strength Amid Tangibility Limitations.**” Within this cluster, three interrelated themes emerged: (1) *Proactive and Guided Service Delivery*, where a customer highlighted staff initiative and anticipatory assistance despite the absence of promotional materials; (2) *Lack of Informational and Promotional Materials*, reflecting limited brochures, flyers, or online presence that constrained customer’s access to service information; and (3) *Doubt and Hesitation Due to Poor Physical Presentation*, where customer’s associated the physical appearance of materials and facilities with uncertainty and reduced confidence in service quality. These themes illustrate how strong interpersonal service qualities, such as responsiveness and assurance, sometimes mitigated weaknesses in tangibility, but were not always sufficient to prevent doubt or dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, the qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by explaining how customers interpreted their satisfaction beyond numerical ratings. The narratives demonstrate that while Sobretudo Funeral Home exhibited strengths in proactive service and staff responsiveness, limitations in tangible aspects, such as promotional materials and physical presentation, shaped customers’ confidence and trust. By systematically organizing customers’ experiences into coherent themes, this analysis provides a deeper understanding of how human-centered service strengths interact with tangible service gaps, thereby offering context-sensitive insights for improving overall customer satisfaction with funeral services in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Table 8

Customers’ Lived Experiences with the Services of Sobretudo Funeral Home

Significant Statement	Code	Formulated Mean	Theme Cluster
<p>“They didn’t post anything when we availed their services. We just went directly to their office. What stood out to me was that they were proactive. Even before we asked, they provided the services included in their package.”</p> <p><i>(Wala man sila nag-post atong panahona nga nag-avail mi. Diretso ra mi sa ilang opisina. Ang naka-stand out sa ilang serbisyo kay proactive sila—bisan wala pa mi nangutana, sila na ang nihatang sa serbisyo nga apil sa ilang package.)</i></p>	CP-1 (Uncle Ibarro)	Proactive and Guided Service Delivery	
<p>“Honestly, we didn’t receive any brochures, flyers, or even see a website from the funeral home.”</p> <p><i>(Sa tinuod lang, kaning mga brochures, flyers, ug website, wala mi naka kita or nadawat nga mga butang gikan sa Sobretudo sa funeral homes.)</i></p>	CP-2 (Auntie Alena)	Lack of Informational and Promotional Materials	Compensated Service Strength Amid Tangibility Limitations
<p>“Regarding materials and service? Of course, you’d feel hesitant... you’d have doubts. You really start to question things just by how it looks. You’d think, “If only there was another option, we would’ve gone there.” But we can’t do anything.”</p> <p><i>(Sa materiales ug serbisyo? Syempre magduha-duha gyud ka. Magduda ka daan kay sa hitsura pa lang murag dili pulido. Makaingon ka nga unta naa pa lay lain, adto na lang unta ta. Pero wala man tay mahimo.)</i></p>	CP-3 (Uncle Hagorn)	Doubt and Hesitation Due to Poor Physical Presentation	

The first emerging theme, **Proactive and Guided Service Delivery**, highlights how customers perceived strong interpersonal service despite the absence of tangible informational materials. CP-1 emphasized that although there were no visible promotions or online posts, the staff proactively explained and delivered services included in the funeral package without being prompted. This finding aligns with recent studies showing that in emotionally sensitive services, proactive staff behavior can significantly enhance perceived service quality and trust (Ladhari, 2020; Rather et al., 2022). Such guided service delivery reduces cognitive and emotional burden on customers who may be overwhelmed by grief and decision-making pressure.

This theme helps explain why reliability, responsiveness, and assurance obtained high quantitative ratings despite weaknesses in tangibility. Similar findings were observed by Lim and Teo (2022), who noted that customers often tolerate weak physical cues when service providers demonstrate competence and anticipatory care. However, this finding contrasts with hospitality and retail studies where proactive service alone is insufficient without strong tangible cues (Wirtz et al., 2021). In the context of funeral services, proactive guidance appears to partially compensate for limited tangibility but does not fully eliminate customer uncertainty. Thus, this theme reinforces the notion that human-centered service strengths mitigated, but did not resolve, tangibility gaps identified in the quantitative results.

The second emerging theme, **Lack of Informational and Promotional Materials**, reflects customers' experiences of limited access to brochures, flyers, or digital platforms such as websites and social media. CP-2's statement indicates that customers relied primarily on face-to-face interactions rather than pre-service information, which constrained their ability to understand service options in advance. This finding is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2023), who found that inadequate informational materials weaken perceived tangibility and reduce customer preparedness, especially in service contexts requiring complex decisions. Quantitatively, this theme corresponds with the lower mean score for tangibility (3.75), suggesting that customers recognized deficiencies in physical and informational cues even while rating other dimensions highly. Some studies argue that in funeral services, customers prioritize empathy over marketing materials (Ladhari, 2020), which may explain why tangibility still achieved a "High Level" rating. However, contrasting evidence from Cheng et al. (2021) indicates that clear informational materials enhance confidence and reduce post-service regret. The absence of such materials in the present study therefore represents a latent service quality weakness, reinforcing the need for balanced service delivery that integrates both interpersonal and tangible elements.

The third theme, **Doubt and Hesitation Due to Poor Physical Presentation**, captures customers' emotional reactions to the physical appearance of service materials and facilities. CP-3 expressed hesitation, doubt, and even regret, associating the visual presentation of services with perceived service quality. This finding supports service quality theory, which posits that tangibles act as "signals" of credibility and professionalism, particularly when customers lack prior experience or alternatives (Wirtz et al., 2021). This theme directly explains why tangibility scored lowest among the SERVQUAL dimensions in the quantitative results. While still rated at a "High Level," the presence of moderate ratings in specific tangibility indicators suggests uneven physical presentation. Similar findings were reported by Rather et al. (2022), who noted that poor physical cues intensify anxiety in emotionally sensitive services. In contrast, some healthcare studies suggest that strong assurance can override weak tangibility (Cheng et al., 2021), which partially explains why customers still proceeded with the service despite doubts. Nonetheless, this theme demonstrates that weak tangibility can undermine trust, even when emotional and interpersonal service elements are strong.

The overarching theme cluster, **"Compensated Service Strength Amid Tangibility Limitations,"** integrates all three emerging themes and provides a comprehensive explanation of the mixed-method findings. Qualitatively, customers consistently described strong staff responsiveness, proactive assistance, and guided decision-making, which compensated for the lack of promotional materials and uneven physical presentation. Quantitatively, this compensation is reflected in the high overall customer satisfaction mean (4.04) and strong scores in reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, despite tangibility being the weakest dimension.

This cluster supports contemporary service quality research asserting that in emotionally sensitive contexts, interpersonal service qualities often outweigh physical attributes (Ladhari, 2020; Lim & Teo, 2022). However, the presence of doubt and hesitation in customer narratives indicates that compensation has limits. When tangible cues are too weak, customers may experience reduced confidence, even if they proceed with the service due to necessity. Thus, the theme cluster underscores a service quality imbalance, where strong human interaction mitigates but does not fully correct deficiencies in tangibility. This integrated finding strengthens the explanatory power of the study by linking lived experiences with numerical satisfaction scores.

Implications for Business Support and Market Development Initiatives

The findings suggest that business support initiatives for funeral service providers should focus on strengthening tangible service components without compromising human-centered care. Developing clear, culturally sensitive brochures, service menus, and basic digital platforms may enhance customer preparedness and reduce hesitation. Market development programs may also provide training on low-cost branding and visual presentation tailored to small, community-based funeral homes. These initiatives may help ensure that strong interpersonal service is reinforced, rather than undermined, by adequate physical and informational cues.

Furthermore, support agencies and local business development offices may assist funeral homes in adopting context-appropriate marketing strategies that respect the emotional nature of the service. Improving tangibility through visual clarity and professional presentation may enhance competitiveness while maintaining compassion and dignity. By addressing both human and physical aspects of service delivery, funeral homes like Sobretudo may strengthen customer confidence, elevate perceived service quality, and achieve more sustainable market positioning within the community.

IV. SUMMARY & INSIGHTS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS & CONCLUDING REMARKS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the summary, insights, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study. It revisits the research problem and briefly restates the procedures undertaken to examine customers' satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province using a mixed-method research approach. The chapter synthesizes the major findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative analyses, highlighting key patterns related to the service quality dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, as well as customers' lived experiences during emotionally sensitive service encounters. The integration of quantitative ratings and qualitative narratives provides a comprehensive understanding of how customers evaluate funeral service quality. This synthesis also clarifies the interaction between human-centered service strengths and tangible service elements. Through this approach, the chapter emphasizes the value of mixed-method inquiry in capturing both measurable outcomes and contextual meanings.

Based on these findings, conclusions are drawn in direct response to the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study. The chapter further discusses the practical implications of the results for service improvement initiatives, customer-centered management practices, and business support and market development efforts within the funeral service industry. Finally, recommendations are presented to guide Sobretodo Funeral Home, similar service providers, and future researchers in enhancing service quality, strengthening customer trust, and advancing empirical research on customer satisfaction in emotionally sensitive service contexts.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to examine customers' satisfaction with the services of Sobretodo Funeral Home in Maasim, Sarangani Province, with particular emphasis on the service quality dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. To address this research objective, the study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction in an emotionally sensitive service context. The quantitative component utilized a descriptive-survey method involving 30 customers who had previously availed of the funeral home's services, selected through purposive sampling.

Furthermore, the data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and weighted means to determine satisfaction levels across service quality dimensions. To complement the survey results, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with selected participants, and the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to capture customers' lived experiences and explanations underlying their satisfaction ratings.

Based on the results and interpretation of the data, the findings of the study were the following:

1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

- 1.1 Out of 30 respondents, 24 (80.00%) were female and 6 (20.00%) were male, indicating female predominance among customers who availed of funeral services.
- 1.2 In terms of age, the majority were 40 years old and above (19 respondents, 63.33%), followed by those aged 37–40 years (6 respondents, 20.00%), suggesting that older adults are more actively involved in funeral service decision-making.
- 1.3 Regarding frequency of patronage, 11 respondents (36.67%) reported availing funeral services rarely, while 8 respondents (26.67%) availed once a year, indicating that funeral services are largely episodic and need-based.
- 1.4 In terms of occupation, 14 respondents (46.67%) were self-employed, 9 (30.00%) were unemployed, and 7 (23.33%) were employed, showing varied economic backgrounds that may influence service expectations and satisfaction.

2. Level of Customer Satisfaction in terms of Service Quality Dimensions

2.1 Reliability

- 2.1.1 The overall weighted mean for Reliability was 4.06, interpreted as a High Level of customer satisfaction.
- 2.1.2 The highest-rated indicator was "The funeral service was conducted on time and in a manner that met the agreed-upon expectations" with a mean of 4.27 (Very High Level).
- 2.1.3 The lowest-rated indicator was "The prices of the products and services were clearly communicated, and there were no unexpected additional charges" with a mean of 3.80 (High Level).
- 2.1.4 This result indicates that timely and accurate service delivery was a strong aspect of service quality, while pricing consistency requires improvement.

2.2 Responsiveness

- 2.2.1 The overall weighted mean for Responsiveness was 4.14, described as a High Level of customer satisfaction.
- 2.2.2 Indicators related to staff willingness to help and prompt response to customer needs received the highest ratings.
- 2.2.3 The lowest-rated indicator involved responsiveness in addressing inquiries related to pricing and service options.
- 2.2.4 These findings suggest that staff were generally prompt and helpful, though responsiveness during cost-related discussions may be enhanced.

2.3 Assurance

- 2.3.1 Assurance obtained the highest overall weighted mean of 4.19, interpreted as a High Level of satisfaction.
- 2.3.2 The highest-rated indicator was "I felt reassured by the staff's knowledge and ability to manage the funeral service with dignity and respect" with a mean of 4.30 (Very High Level).
- 2.3.3 The lowest-rated indicator concerned clarity of pricing explanations, with a mean of 4.07 (High Level).
- 2.3.4 This demonstrates that professionalism, competence, and courtesy strongly contributed to customer confidence.

2.4 Empathy

- 2.4.1 The overall weighted mean for Empathy was 4.09, indicating a High Level of customer satisfaction.
- 2.4.2 The highest-rated indicator emphasized staff's genuine concern and understanding of customers' emotional needs, with a mean of 4.17.
- 2.4.3 The lowest-rated indicator related to empathetic communication during pricing discussions, with a mean of 3.97.
- 2.4.4 These results show that emotional support was a major strength, although sensitivity during

financial discussions can still be improved.

2.5 Tangibility

- 2.5.1 Tangibility recorded an overall weighted mean of 3.86, interpreted as a High Level, but ranked as the lowest among the five service quality dimensions.
- 2.5.2 The highest-rated indicator referred to the cleanliness and orderliness of the funeral service facilities.
- 2.5.3 The lowest-rated indicator involved the availability and quality of promotional and informational materials.
- 2.5.4 This finding indicates that while physical facilities were acceptable, improvements in visual presentation and informational resources are needed.

Insights

The qualitative findings of the study provide deeper insights into how customers experienced the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home beyond numerical satisfaction ratings. Overall, the results indicate that human-centered service qualities played a dominant role in shaping customer satisfaction, particularly during emotionally sensitive situations. Customers consistently emphasized proactive guidance, anticipatory assistance, and compassionate interaction from staff, suggesting that responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were experienced as more critical than physical or informational service elements. These interpersonal strengths helped customers feel supported and guided, especially when they lacked prior knowledge or alternative service options. However, the qualitative narratives also revealed that limitations in tangibility heightened customer uncertainty and hesitation, particularly in the absence of brochures, flyers, or clear visual service cues. Customers relied heavily on verbal explanations to understand service packages and arrangements, which, while helpful, increased the risk of confusion or doubt during emotionally vulnerable moments. Some participants associated poor physical presentation and lack of informational materials with reduced confidence in service quality, indicating that tangibility served as an important signal of professionalism and credibility. This insight explains why tangibility emerged as the lowest-rated service quality dimension in the quantitative findings, despite overall satisfaction remaining high.

Moreover, the qualitative results suggest that service quality was experienced as imbalanced rather than uniformly strong. While customers deeply appreciated staff compassion and initiative, the absence of consistent tangible support limited the overall service experience from being perceived as fully polished and reassuring. The emotional context of funeral services further amplified both strengths and weaknesses, as customers were more sensitive to service cues during periods of grief. Taken together, these insights validate and enrich the quantitative results by demonstrating that although Sobretudo Funeral Home achieved high customer satisfaction through strong interpersonal service, addressing tangible service gaps may lead to a more balanced, confidence-building, and holistic funeral service experience for customers in Maasim, Sarangani Province.

Implications of Qualitative Findings

1. Theory and Knowledge Building

The qualitative findings contribute to theory and knowledge building by reinforcing the importance of human-centered service quality in emotionally sensitive service contexts such as funeral services. The results support service quality theories, particularly the SERVQUAL framework, by demonstrating that interpersonal dimensions, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, can compensate for weaknesses in tangibility. However, the findings also extend existing theory by showing that such compensation is limited and situational, rather than absolute.

Customers' narratives reveal that tangibility remains a critical signaling mechanism for professionalism and trust, especially during moments of emotional vulnerability. This insight refines theoretical assumptions that prioritize emotional service elements alone in grief-related services. The study thus suggests a more integrative understanding of service quality, where tangible and intangible dimensions interact dynamically. Overall, the qualitative results enrich the theoretical discourse by contextualizing service quality within lived experiences of bereavement.

2. Educational and Professional Practice

The qualitative findings highlight important implications for education and professional practice in service-oriented and care-related professions. The emphasis placed by customers on proactive guidance and compassionate interaction underscores the need for training programs that develop emotional intelligence, anticipatory service skills, and grief sensitivity. Funeral service practitioners must be equipped not only with technical competence but also with interpersonal communication skills that address emotional distress.

At the same time, the findings suggest that professional preparation should include awareness of how physical presentation and informational materials influence client trust. Integrating customer experience case studies into training curricula may help practitioners understand the real-life consequences of service gaps. Continuous professional development can further reinforce reflective and empathetic practice. Thus, education and training programs should balance emotional care competencies with service presentation skills.

3. Program and Policy Implications

The qualitative results suggest that program and policy interventions in the funeral service sector should address both human and material dimensions of service delivery. While staff compassion and responsiveness are strengths, the absence of standardized informational materials points to a need for policy guidelines on minimum service presentation standards. Local regulatory bodies and industry associations may consider developing basic requirements for brochures, service menus, or client information sheets.

Such policies can help protect customers from confusion and uncertainty during emotionally sensitive decision-making. The findings also imply that support programs for small funeral service providers should include assistance in developing client communication tools. Policies that promote transparency and clarity can strengthen consumer trust without undermining

compassionate service. Overall, the study supports balanced policy approaches that enhance both service ethics and operational consistency.

4. Creativity and Innovation

The qualitative findings open opportunities for creativity and innovation in funeral service delivery, particularly in addressing gaps in tangibility. Innovative yet culturally sensitive service materials, such as simple visual guides or digital service menus, may enhance customer understanding without appearing commercialized. The reliance on verbal explanations suggests room for creative communication tools that reduce emotional burden during service selection. Innovation may also involve redesigning physical spaces and materials to convey calmness, dignity, and reassurance. Importantly, creativity may complement, not replace, human interaction, as customers valued personal guidance most. The study implies that innovation in emotionally sensitive services may be subtle, respectful, and client-centered. Thus, creative solutions may focus on improving clarity and comfort rather than aggressive marketing.

5. Socio-Cultural Implications

The qualitative results reflect the socio-cultural context of funeral services, where personal interaction, trust, and relational care are deeply valued. Customers' acceptance of limited tangible resources, when offset by compassionate service, reflects cultural norms emphasizing pakikipagkapwa, damayan, and interpersonal support. However, the expressed doubt and hesitation also suggest evolving expectations influenced by exposure to more formalized service standards. This indicates a transition where traditional relational values coexist with emerging expectations for professionalism and presentation. Funeral services, therefore, operate at the intersection of cultural tradition and modern service expectations. The findings highlight the need for culturally grounded yet adaptive service practices. Ultimately, service quality must respect local values while responding to changing social perceptions of professionalism.

6. Ethico-Moral Implications

The qualitative findings underscore important ethico-moral considerations in funeral service delivery. Customers' vulnerability during bereavement places a moral responsibility on service providers to act with honesty, compassion, and respect. The absence of clear informational materials raises ethical concerns related to informed decision-making and transparency. While proactive staff assistance mitigated these concerns, reliance solely on verbal explanations may expose clients to emotional pressure or misunderstanding.

Ethical practice requires that customers are given clear, accessible, and non-coercive information about services and costs. The findings affirm that ethical service delivery extends beyond kindness to include clarity, fairness, and accountability. Thus, funeral service providers must balance compassion with ethical transparency to uphold client dignity.

Conclusions

Considering the findings of this study, it is concluded that:

1. The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that funeral service arrangements in the study area were largely managed by women, highlighting their active role in family caregiving and decision-making during times of bereavement. The predominance of middle-aged to older adults among the respondents further suggests that individuals with greater familial responsibility and life experience typically handle funeral-related transactions. The occupational distribution, which was largely composed of individuals engaged in non-professional or informal work, reflects the community-based clientele of Sobretudo Funeral Home and provides important context for customers' expectations, affordability concerns, and sensitivity to service costs. Moreover, the finding that most respondents availed of funeral services only once confirms that funeral service utilization was situational and need-driven rather than habitual. Taken together, these demographic characteristics emphasize the importance of providing compassionate, clear, and financially sensitive services, as customers are often navigating funeral arrangements for the first time while coping with emotional stress and practical constraints.

2. The overall level of customer satisfaction with the services of Sobretudo Funeral Home was high, as reflected by the composite weighted mean of 4.04 across all five SERVQUAL dimensions. Among these dimensions, assurance ranked the highest, indicating that customers placed the greatest value on staff competence, professionalism, and the ability to provide services with dignity and confidence during emotionally difficult moments. This was followed by responsiveness and empathy, which further emphasizes the importance of prompt assistance and compassionate interaction in funeral service delivery. Reliability also contributed positively to customer satisfaction by ensuring that services were delivered as promised, while tangibility ranked lowest, suggesting that physical and promotional aspects were less influential in shaping overall perceptions. These results demonstrate that customers prioritized human-centered service qualities over material features. Overall, the findings underscore that trust, emotional support, and professional conduct were the primary drivers of customer satisfaction in the funeral service context.

Concluding Remarks

The journey of conducting this study was both academically demanding and personally meaningful, as it required the researchers to engage deeply with an emotionally sensitive service context while maintaining scholarly rigor. One of the primary challenges encountered was gathering reliable data from respondents who had experienced loss, which demanded sensitivity, patience, and ethical mindfulness throughout the data collection process. Ensuring that questions were clear, respectful, and non-intrusive required multiple revisions of the research instruments and careful coordination with participants. Despite these challenges, the process revealed the importance of empathy not only as a research variable but also as a guiding principle in conducting fieldwork.

An unexpected discovery during the study was the extent to which interpersonal service qualities, such as assurance, responsiveness, and empathy, outweighed physical and promotional aspects in shaping customer satisfaction. While the researchers initially assumed that tangible factors would play a more dominant role, the findings highlighted how trust, professionalism, and emotional support became central during moments of grief. This realization deepened the researchers' understanding of service

quality in emotionally charged environments and reinforced the value of mixed-method approaches in capturing both measurable outcomes and lived experiences.

Throughout the research process, the researchers experienced significant personal and professional growth. The study strengthened their skills in research design, data analysis, and academic writing, while also enhancing their capacity for reflexivity and ethical awareness. Engaging with participants' narratives fostered a deeper appreciation of the human dimension behind statistical results. Ultimately, this research journey affirmed the responsibility of researchers to balance methodological rigor with compassion, and it underscored the importance of producing studies that are not only academically sound but also socially and humanely grounded.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers therefore recommend the following:

Sobretudo Funeral Home Management and Owners. Based on the high customer satisfaction driven by assurance, responsiveness, and empathy, management may be encouraged to sustain and institutionalize strong interpersonal service practices through regular staff training and performance monitoring. Given that tangibility ranked lowest among the service quality dimensions, management may invest in improving informational and physical service materials, such as brochures, service menus, and visual aids that clearly explain packages and inclusions. Enhancing price transparency through written cost breakdowns and pre-arrangement consultations is also recommended to address recurring concerns related to pricing clarity. Simple improvements in facility presentation and communication tools may further strengthen customer confidence and trust. Maintaining a balance between compassionate service and professional presentation may help ensure a more holistic and reassuring funeral service experience.

Employees and Service Personnel of Funeral Homes. Employees and service personnel may continue demonstrating empathy, professionalism, and responsiveness, as these qualities were identified as the strongest contributors to customer satisfaction. Staff may receive additional guidance on communicating pricing and service details clearly and compassionately, especially during emotionally sensitive interactions. Developing confidence in explaining service options and confirming customer understanding may reduce uncertainty and improve overall satisfaction. Employees may also provide consistent service regardless of customer background, recognizing the diverse economic circumstances of clients. Continuous self-reflection and sensitivity training may further enhance service delivery.

Customers and Bereaved Families. Customers and bereaved families may actively ask questions and seek clarification regarding service inclusions, pricing, and arrangements to ensure informed decision-making. Awareness of available service options may help families select arrangements that best match their emotional and financial needs. Families may also provide constructive feedback to funeral service providers, which can support service improvement initiatives. Open communication with service personnel may help reduce anxiety and misunderstandings during the bereavement process. Being informed and engaged may empower families to navigate funeral arrangements with greater confidence.

Local Government Units (LGUs) and Regulatory Agencies. Local Government Units and regulatory agencies may consider strengthening guidelines on transparency and consumer protection in funeral service operations. Policies encouraging clear pricing disclosures and minimum informational standards may help safeguard bereaved families from confusion or unexpected charges. LGUs may also support capacity-building programs for small funeral service providers, focusing on service quality improvement and ethical practices. Monitoring compliance with service standards may promote fairness and professionalism across the sector. Such initiatives may enhance public trust in funeral service institutions within the locality.

Maasim Community and Society. The Maasim community may support local funeral service providers by engaging in open dialogue regarding service expectations and cultural practices related to death and mourning. Community awareness initiatives may help normalize discussions about funeral planning and service options. Strengthening community-based support systems may complement formal funeral services, especially during times of loss. Recognizing the role of compassion and professionalism in funeral services may foster mutual respect between providers and clients. A supportive community environment contributes to dignified and culturally sensitive funeral practices.

Academic Community and Future Researchers. The academic community may expand research on service quality in emotionally sensitive industries, particularly funeral services, which remain underexplored in local contexts. Future researchers may examine comparative studies across different funeral homes or municipalities to enhance generalizability. Incorporating additional variables such as cultural practices, grief intensity, or long-term satisfaction may enrich future inquiries. Mixed-method and longitudinal approaches may capture evolving customer experiences. Further research may strengthen the theoretical and empirical understanding of service quality in grief-related services.

ABM Students and Educators. ABM students and educators may integrate real-world service quality cases from emotionally sensitive industries into business and management curricula. The study highlights the importance of customer-centered management, ethical service delivery, and emotional intelligence alongside operational efficiency. Educators may use the findings to demonstrate how SERVQUAL dimensions apply beyond traditional business sectors. Students may benefit from analyzing how interpersonal skills influence customer satisfaction and organizational reputation. This integration may help prepare future business professionals for managing service-oriented enterprises with both competence and compassion.

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