

Relationships between Service Quality, Service Marketing Mix, and Behavioral Intention: Consumers' Perspectives on Short-term Accommodation Service for Tourism in Thailand

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the degree of perceived service quality, service marketing mix, and behavior intention of tourists in Thailand. It also studies the relationship between service quality and service marketing mix on behavioral intention of tourists using Thailand's short-term accommodation service. Research methods used in this study is questionnaire, with 5-point Likert scales. The targeted samples are 1,540 tourists who have used short-term accommodation service in Thailand. 1,127 questionnaires were completed and returned, making up 73.18% of all questionnaires distributed. Collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The former includes means and standard variations which were used to determine the degree of each variables. The latter includes Pearson correlation analysis for the analysis of relationships between variables. The study shows that the overall service quality and behavioral intention were rated as high, with overall marketing mix rated at the highest level. As for correlations, service quality is found to be moderately and positively correlated with behavioral intention. A similar moderate and positive correlation is found between service marketing and behavioral intention. All variables are statistically significant at the .01 level.

Keywords: Service Quality, Service Marketing Mix, Behavioral Intention, Short-term Accommodation Service for Tourism

1. Introduction

In 2019, Thailand has welcomed over 39 million foreign tourists. This number shows that tourist expansion rate in Thailand has grown by 4.24% from that in 2018, and the tourist expansion rate in 2018 has grown by 7.27% compared to that in 2017. Moreover, other than the increasing number of tourists, income from international tourists also amounted to over 1.96 billion Thai baht, with a tendency to further increase[1]. Popular tourist destination provinces for both Thai and foreign tourists include Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Chiangmai, and Nakhonratchasima[2]. Domestic tourism market has been expanding continuously over the years as a result of the government's policies on tourism promotion, as well as low cost of domestic tourism, fuel, transportation, and accommodation. Over 154 million domestic travels marked a 6.2% tourism expansion rate, contributing over 0.96 billion baht[3]. This large number of both Thai and foreign tourists, as well as world's tourism expansion, encouraged airline companies to expand their routes in order to accommodate tourism demands in many countries across the world, including Thailand. United Nation's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has estimated that by 2020, the number of tourists in ASEAN countries may reach 123 million, and by 2030, 187 million.

Tourism business has created value chains across regions, such as restaurant, logistics, and transportation services. Souvenir and accommodation services have also generated over 2 million employments in Thailand [4]. Hotel profits are directly correlated with the direction of tourism, that is, the higher number of customers, the higher income. Hotel incomes are from number of tourists, length of stay, and accommodation prices. Of the overall income, 60-70% comes from hotel accommodation, while 25% comes from food and drinks. Note that there may be differences across different types of hotels. For example, 4 and 5-star hotels usually have more income from food and drinks than smaller hotels do. They also have other incomes which contribute extra 5-10% to their overall income. However, hotel business in Thailand still faces the problem of oversupply in many regions. Due to the increasing number of foreign tourists, demand and supply in tourism has increased in the past five years, with the average of occupancy rate of 59%. As a result, investments in hotel and accommodation industry has significantly increased, as well as competition from substitute services such as online platforms and daily rooms. While these are illegal, no strict regulations and penalties have been enforced yet[5].

Increasing number of tourists and accommodation services may intensify competition in hotel industry. Moreover, the arrival of substitute services mentioned above may further pressure current hotels, especially SMEs, as they may have to lower their prices to attract customers. There have been attempts to convince substitute businesses and uncertified hotels to have their businesses legalized. However, such attempts have not been very successful, and many hotels are still providing illegal accommodation services[5]. There are currently 20,000 hotels across Thailand, providing 700,000 rooms. Amongst the 20,000 hotels, approximately 9,600 hotels (400,000 rooms)

are certified, while other 10,400, most of which are small hotels, are not registered[6]. This means that only 35% of hotels in Thailand are certified.

Furthermore, sharing economy has been continuously growing and expanding short-term accommodation. This may be because this type of accommodation costs less than staying in a hotel and has a variety of accommodation for tourists to choose from, from room in a shared house to condominium. In other words, short-term accommodation becomes popular because it offers something different from a typical stay in a hotel. Over 360,000 Thai tourists have used this type of accommodation service[7]. In 2016, over 160,000 tourists from 135 countries booked their accommodation in Chiangmai through AirBNB[8]. According to AirDNA [9], the number of this type of accommodation in Bangkok is 8,891, followed by 8,238 in Phuket, 2,945 in Patthaya, and 2,423 in Chiangmai. Tourists' preference for local experience may be another reason why tourists may prefer short-term accommodation. Homestay, local life-based accommodation may inevitably affect budget hotels. Overall, uncertified accommodation service such as this is affecting hotel incomes and profits and also limiting their price ranges.

Accommodation services that take a direct impact are small hotels, especially low- and mid-range. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions. The authors of the present study argue that it is important to study and explore how short-term accommodation business can be supported and further developed without negatively impacting other types of accommodation, as well as how to appropriately prepare this business in order to best accommodate future tourists, both Thais and foreigners. Meanwhile, it is crucial that the government examines the impacts that short-term accommodation services have hotel and small accommodation businesses, especially low- and mid-range. The government could also benefit from policies that encourage short-term accommodation to improve their services and accommodation management to best suit customers' needs and behaviors. According to the literature, tourists' word of mouth and revisit intention to tourism destinations and accommodation are based on perceived service quality and total perceived quality. These concepts come from the analysis of customers' behaviours and expectation of service quality, both of which may affect customers' post-service assessment. According to Grönroos [10][11], customer's perceived service quality comes from correlations between expected quality and experienced quality.

Most of the criteria with which customers assess service quality are about service and service goods. The rest of the criteria are about service staff's performance. Some of the most frequently used research instruments for service quality assessment are SERVQUAL model, and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's [12] RATER model. These models were later further developed and applied to the context of accommodation service studies. Akbaba [13], Amisah and Amenumey [14], and Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis[15] identified 25 service quality attributes from the initial 29 SERVQUAL attributes and utilized five service quality dimensions, namely tangibles, adequacy in service supply, understanding and caring, assurance, and convenience. Service marketing mix can also be employed in order to accommodate customers and target groups' needs[16]. A marketing tool which facilitates and supports knowledge exchanging and inter-relationships with customers by exploring their needs can be developed into service that can effectively accommodate and satisfy customers. This in return will help support the government's policies to encourage and strengthen efficiency of short-term accommodation business in Thailand. Due to the reasons mentioned here, the authors intend to explore factors influencing customer's positive post-service behavioral intention, that is, revisit intention and word of mouth communication, both in person and online (electronic word of mouth).

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are: 1) to study the degree of perceived service quality, service marketing mix, and behavioral intention; and 2) to examine relationships between service quality and service marketing mix on behavioural intentions of short-term accommodation service customers in Thailand.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Service Quality

Service quality emerges when customers compare their service expectation with perceived provided service[17], [10], and the latter have exceeded the former[19]. In other words, service quality is the difference between the actual service and customers' expectation of that service. Lehtinen and Lehtinen[20], Grönroos [11], and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry[12],[21],[22] identified 3 components of service quality: interaction, physical, and corporate. However, from high-rank executives' and customers' perspectives, the two key components of service quality are output quality and process. Grönroos[11],[12] has pointed out the importance of technical quality and prior performance quality which may affect output quality. Technical quality refers to what being provided to customers, such as food in restaurants, consult session at a consulting firm, and houses by property representatives. Performance quality is relevant to the process in which service is provided to customers in psychological and

behavioral aspects, as well as staff's ability to approach customers, staff's behaviors during service, especially their verbal communication, co-production between service providers and customers, and service methods.

3.2 SERVQUAL Model

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry[12] has proposed two key concepts in service quality assessment: 1) promoting understanding of service quality and customers' expectation, with the focus being placed on the emphasis of differences between customers' needs and minimum expectation, and; 2) recommendation of three-column format SERVQUAL Model with less attributes. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry[22] have suggested that only 21 attributes are sufficient, 9-level scale is more appropriate than 7-level scale, three-dimension perspective is more appropriate than five-dimension perspective, and that responsiveness, assurance, and empathy can be merged into one single category. This was later further developed as following:

1. Tangibles: evidence of physical facilities that are reliable, responsive, confident, and empathetic
2. Reliability: ability to perform the promised service dependently and accurately
3. Responsiveness: ability and willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
4. Assurance: knowledge and courtesy of employees to build trust and confidence in customers towards the service provider
5. Empathy: provision of caring, individualized attention provided to customers, and aiming to understand customers' needs.

Akbaba[23] later identified 25 service quality attributes on the basis of the initial 29 SERVQUAL attributes and utilized five service quality dimensions, namely tangibles, adequacy in service supply, understanding and caring, assurance, and convenience.

3.3 Service marketing mix

Marketing mix is a set of controllable marketing tool [24], employed by service companies to create a desired response in the target market[25]. Marketing components are used to attract customers' demands for goods and services[24], which in turn could increase sales and profits. Marketing mix components include: product, price, place, and promotion (4Ps). However, service marketing is more complicated than 4Ps or marketing mix in general [26], [27],[28] and thus, require a marketing mix that emphasizes interactive marketing and internal marketing. The three additional Ps (3Ps) are people, physical evidence and presentation, and process. People means that service providers must be skilled, with service-minded and positive attitude towards customers. They should also have creativity and problem-solving skill. Physical evidence and presentation refer to creating and presenting physical appearance and service methods in order to create service values. This includes being clean-cut, polite verbal communication, prompt service, as well as other benefits to which customers are entitled. Lastly, process refers to regulation- and practice-related service activities offered to customers which help provide them with impressively prompt and accurate services. Therefore, 7Ps is a controllable tool which reflects customers' satisfaction. Clear understanding of service providers' marketing mix components may also allow businesses to sustain and turn current customers into regular customers.

Apart from 7Ps, another key factor which marks the main value of tourism and encourages tourists to travel is uniqueness and local authenticity, with the latter meaning real and genuine. In the context of tourism, values of tourists and hosts can be explained as contributions towards cultural development and consumptions. Goods and authentic experience that are relevant to tourism are: 1) objective authenticity: tourists' actual experiences with items or symbols that can be proven authentic; 2) constructive authenticity: encapsulation of subjective nature that has been created and socially accepted, as well as cultural commoditization by applying cultural aspects to goods or tourism activities to show their value and authenticity, attracting tourists to make a purchase or to visit; 3) existential authenticity: authenticity activated by tourists themselves during their genuine and authentic everyday experiences.

Certain groups of tourists may seek for novelty experience, including new destinations and exciting tourism activities[29]. They may want to explore somewhere they have not visited, learn about something new and never-before-seen, take risks, and immerse themselves into different environments. Moreover, tourists' personalities and expressions are of important values as they can reflect tourists' needs, since behavioral expressions are often results of internal subjective factors. Novelty is a process of experiencing and encountering something different from usual daily life experience. It may be referred to as new or unusual, both of which share the same meaning with novelty[30]. In general, novelty in tourism is often defined as part of experiences that emerge from each individual's expectation, forming foundation of tourism experience and connected to perception of newness and deviation from

everyday life encounters[31]. Novelty is also a motivation behind tourists’ behaviors[32], and is also relevant to experiences of tourism impression.

3.4 Behavioral intention

Behavioral intention refers to customers’ post-service expressions. It is a motivational factor that can influence further behaviors and indicate that such behaviors are made with effort[33]. That is, it is possible that customers may act on their intention by happily and willingly using the service, recommending the service to others, and revisiting [34],[35],[36],[37]. Tourists’ behavioral intention studies may be used to further study tourists’ future behaviors and their tendency to revisit and recommend to others[38]. Behavioral intention can be evaluated from two dimensions. First, re-visit intention refers to tourists’ intention towards tourism destination and revisiting in the future. And secondly, recommendation intention refers to post-service behaviors in which tourists recommend the service to others or describe their positive experiences and impression so that others may travel to the same tourism destinations.

4. Research Methods

This study is a quantitative research using questionnaire as a research tool. The questionnaire is divided into three parts: perceived service quality, service marketing mix, and behavior intention of Thailand’s short-term accommodation service customers. 5-point Likert scale is employed, ranking from minimum to maximum, with minimum being strongly disagree = 1, and maximum being strongly agree = 5. The overall reliability is .85.

Research population is customers of short-term accommodation service for tourism in Thailand. The total population is infinite. The authors used Cochran’s[39] formula for infinite population to calculate the sample size that estimated 385 samples, with reliability set at 95% and error at 5%. The authors collected data from customers of short-term accommodation service for tourism in Thailand in four provinces with the highest numbers of customers: Phuket, Chonburi, Chiangmai, and Bangkok. The total number of samples is 1,540. Of all the questionnaires distributed, 1,127 were returned (73.18%). Descriptive statistics used to study the degree of each variable are mean and standard variation, which were then evaluated with Phisayaboot’s[40] interpretation criteria of respondents’ mean scores. Each mean score range indicates as follows: 4.21 to 5.00 – highest degree; 3.41 to 4.20 – high degree; 2.61 to 3.40 – moderate degree; 1.81 to 2.60 low degree; and 1.00 to 1.80 – lowest degree. Referential statistics used is Pearson Correlation Analysis to examine relationships across variables. Interpretation criteria of correlation coefficients[41] are as follows: .81 to 1.00 – very high correlation; .61 to .80 – high correlation; .41 to .60 – moderate correlation; .21 to .40 – low correlation; and .00 to .20 – very low correlation.

5. Results

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of service quality, service marketing mix and behavioral intention of the customers using Thailand short-term accommodation service for tourism.

| Dimension | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Service Quality | 3.58 | 0.55 |
| Tangibles | 3.66 | 0.67 |
| Convenience | 3.59 | 0.66 |
| Assurance | 3.62 | 0.63 |
| Understanding and Caring | 3.53 | 0.73 |
| Adequacy Service Supply | 3.51 | 0.67 |
| Service Marketing Mix | 3.50 | 0.52 |
| Product | 3.52 | 0.61 |
| Price | 3.50 | 0.69 |
| Unique and Local Authenticity | 3.51 | 0.70 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Novelty | 3.54 | 0.69 |
| Process | 3.48 | 0.63 |
| Sustainability | 3.46 | 0.63 |
| Behavioral Intension | 3.50 | 0.58 |
| Revisit | 3.56 | 0.71 |
| Word-of-Mouth | 3.44 | 0.68 |
| Total | 3.53 | 0.48 |

From Table 1, the finding suggests that respondents’ mean scores on service quality in overall is at the high level ($M=3.58, SD=.55$). Looking into each aspect, the aspect with the highest mean score is “tangibles”, which is at the high degree ($M=3.66, SD=0.67$), following by “assurance”, also at the high degree ($M=3.62, SD=0.63$), subsequently following with “convenience” at the high degree ($M=3.59, SD=0.66$), and “adequacy service supply” has the lowest mean score, but is at the high degree ($M=3.51, SD=0.67$).

Respondents’ mean scores on service marketing mix in overall is at the high degree ($M=3.50, SD=.52$). Looking into each aspect, the aspect with the highest mean score is “novelty” at the high level ($M=3.54, SD=0.69$), following with “product” at the high level ($M=3.52, SD=0.61$) and “unique and local authenticity” at the high level ($M=3.51, SD=0.70$). “Sustainability” has the lowest mean score at the high level ($M=3.46, SD=0.63$). Respondents’ mean scores on behavioral Intension in overall is at the high value ($M=3.50, SD=.58$), Looking into each aspect, the highest mean score is “revisit” at the high level ($M=3.56, SD=0.71$), following with “word-of-mouth” at the high level ($M=3.44, SD=0.68$).

Table 2: Relationships between service quality and behavioral intension of customers using Thailand short-term accommodation service for tourism.

| Service Quality | Behavioral Intension |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Tangibles | .315** |
| Convenience | .411** |
| Assurance | .436** |
| Understanding and Caring | .427** |
| Adequacy Service Supply | .386** |
| Total | .484** |

** $p < .01$

From Table 2, the results suggest that service quality factor and behavioral intention of customers using Thailand short-term accommodation service for tourism have moderate positive correlation ($r = .484^{**}$) with statistical significance at the level of .01. Looking into each aspect, behavioral intention has relatively low positive correlations is tangibles ($r = .315^{**}$) and adequacy service supply ($r = .386^{**}$) with statistical significance at the level of 01. and aspect that have medium positive correlation with behavioral intention is convenience ($r = .411^{**}$), assurance ($r = .436^{**}$) and understanding and caring ($r = .427^{**}$) every of this has statistical significance at the level of 01.

Table 3: Relationships between service marketing mix and behavioral intention of customers using Thailand short-term accommodation service for tourism.

| Service Marketing Mix | Behavioral Intension |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Product | .405** |
| Price | .377** |
| Unique and Local Authenticity | .355** |
| Novelty | .446** |
| Process | .417** |
| Sustainability | .444** |
| Total | .520** |

** $p < .01$

From the Table 3, the findings suggest that the factor of service marketing mix and behavioral intention of the customers using Thailand short-term accommodation service for tourism have medium positive correlation with the value of ($r = .520^{**}$) with statistical significance at the level of 01.. Looking into each aspect, the aspect that has low positive correlation with behavioral intention is price with the value of ($r = .377^{**}$) and unique and local authenticity ($r = .355^{**}$) with statistical significance at the level of 01. and aspect with medium positive correlation with behavioral intention is product ($r = .405^{**}$), novelty ($r = .446^{**}$), process ($r = .417^{**}$) and sustainability ($r = .444^{**}$). All correlations have statistical significance at the level of .01.

6. Discussions

1. Overall, mean scores of service quality, service marketing mix, and behavioral intention are at the high level. This may be because Thai people are good-natured and good hosts. Thailand has great diversity of natural resources, arts, traditions, and cultures across regions, which gave rise to many different unique identities. Sharing house or other types of accommodation does not require much cost when compared to hotels. Therefore, cheaper prices can be offered. This is in line with Guttentag [42] who suggests that customers seek for money savers, interaction, and local authenticity. The latter refers to how customers experience real, genuine local ways of life. Most hotels, on the contrary, share similar accommodation standards under the concept of sharing economy. Customers tend to be home seekers, that is, they prefer to stay somewhere that feels like home rather than hotel rooms. The results are also in line with Colliers International Thailand’s research[43] that AirBnB can stimulate the economy. Home owners renting out their houses or accommodation earn more income, while tourists receive better experience than staying at a hotel, as they can live the local lifestyle while exploring new destinations. The findings in this study also align with that in Ratsamimala[44] that the factor influencing tourists to make a reservation through the online platform Airbnb due to impression on prior reservation experience and recommendation from other previous customers. The main reasons include location, home feeling, and local experience.

2. Convenience, assurance, understanding and caring, product, novelty, process and sustainability factors are moderately correlated with customers’ behavioral intention. This may be due to convenience of reservation and payment through the online platform, accessibility, safety of short-term accommodations, and accommodating hosts. However, tangibles and adequacy service supply, unique and local authenticity, and price factors are correlated with behavioral intention at a low degree. This is possibly because certain accommodations may lack facilities required by customers to ensure their comfort. Some tourists may assume that short-term accommodation can provide mainly household facilities as opposed to those at hotels. This finding is in line with Onsam-ang[45] who states that factors influencing customers’ choice of boutique hotels, from most influential to least influential, are well-equipped facilities, attractive lighting, natural fragrance, beautiful design, and appropriate music. Moreover, similarly to the findings in Thapthimcharoon[46], factors contributing to success and potential of small-scale accommodation business include introducing new technology to the business, adding product and service values, boosting competitiveness by improving strategies and new marketing techniques, developing potentials of small-sized business owners to meet international standards, and supporting values that leave good impression with tourists. Lastly, the findings in the present study also align with that in Chiarananthana[47] that factors influencing decision making of boutique hotel customers are products, reasonable price, cleanliness and scenery, public relations and promotion, room facilities, convenient and accessible location, and staff.

7. Conclusion

Service quality of short-term accommodation for tourism in Thailand, modern tangibles provided by the host that can facilitate tourists' stay as if they were at their own home, and beautifully and uniquely crafted design and decoration intended to give customers a non-tradition hotel experience. Each region of Thailand boasts different characteristics of short-term accommodation for tourism, as each has their own unique landforms, cultures, architecture, and local lifestyles. Service provider also plays an important role in service quality assessment because other than tangibles in SERVQUAL Model, all other dimensions are relevant to service staff's performance and directly affect customers' perception of service quality. Therefore, it is crucial that entrepreneurs realize the important role service staff play. They must have knowledge and skills necessary for the service they provide, be polite and friendly towards customers, treat them like family, and assure customers that they are provided with quality service and safety of life and personal belongings throughout their stay.

Products of service marketing mix of short-term accommodation for tourism in Thailand are accommodation characteristics and novelty activities arranged by the accommodation service provider which respond to customers' desire to explore local experience and city experience in Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiangmai. Tourists that seek novelty tourism experience often seek for tourism destinations that they have not visited and allow them to learn about something never-before-seen. However, it is a challenge to establish service criteria because how service is delivered to customers may vary across service staff and their service production process and expression. Moreover, since service is about perceptive experience, it is intangible and perishable. However, it can be imprinted in customers' memory and can be resold through word of mouth communication. When customers have positive experience with their stay and activities arranged by the accommodation service, they memorize that feeling to which they refer when making next positive interaction.

8. Recommendations

1. Accommodation should be beautifully and uniquely decorated, and its facilities are modern, in working order, and equipped with detailed user's manual or limitation guidelines in the languages of target tourist groups.
2. Comfort, care, and solution of problems should be readily available upon customers' request. Reservation system or process are uncomplicated, and the platform is user friendly. The host is accommodating, treating customers like family. Both the host and service staff are encouraged to develop basic foreign language communication skills.
3. Accommodation information available on various media should represent the actual and current state of the place. Information or photos of accommodation posted on online platforms should be true to the actual rooms. Security of both rooms and surrounding areas are prioritized, and safety equipment is readily and clearly available at various spots.
4. Accommodation should be prepared or renovated to show its novelty in order to respond to customers' needs to seek novelty tourism experience in local communities, less visited provinces, and new, unique accommodation. If accommodation is in urban area, the focus should be placed on identity or originality. Attention should also be paid on cleanliness of rooms and surrounding areas.
5. Short-term accommodation pricing is often lower than that of hotels, with number of guests taken into consideration. Accommodation with higher pricing may indicate its advantages such as convenient access to tourist attractions and shopping centers, exceeding number of accommodation facilities, and its unique characteristics which cannot be found elsewhere.
6. Specific local characteristics could offer new experience and activities for tourists to try and immerse themselves in local lifestyles, explore nearby local communities, and purchase from local shop. Accommodation may also impress tourists with certain highlights such as enjoying local food with the host, rafting, visiting flower farms, famous tourist attractions nearby, and interesting festivals.
7. Service and check-in process should be uncomplicated. Room sale should be administered on online platforms since most tourists are millennials. They are exposed to technology, access it, and apply it to their everyday lives more than customers from other generations. Therefore, they are more likely to make a reservation through online platforms which offer more convenient and quick options to find cheaper rooms than hotels.
8. Service goods for services provided at the accommodation should be environmentally sustainable, or support local products and services.

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