

Tourists' Satisfaction with Spa Services: A Case Study of the Eastern Region of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research is quantitative research using a survey with a questionnaire distributed among tourists who used wellness spa services in the four provinces in the Eastern region of Thailand. As health tourism is now growing, Tourism Authority of Thailand has made an attempt to create Thailand as an international hub of health tourism. The wellness spa industry is an integral part of health tourism, and it is developing to be a holistic wellness spa business, including health, beauty, and anti-aging. Tourists interested in wellness spa services are opulent and willing to spend money for health, beauty, and rejuvenation. Expected quality, perceived quality, and outcomes of using services are latent to be examined in this research. Expected quality was designated as dependent latent, perceived quality was designated as intervening latent, and outcomes of using services was designated as dependent latent. Items on 5 marketing mixes and on 5 service quality determinants were used as reflective indicators of the latent. The findings of the research revealed that their expected quality of wellness spa services was high, and their perceived quality was even higher. The expected quality and the perceived quality of the five determinants of services were all high. The findings confirmed a hypothesis that with perceived quality exceeding expected quality, their behaviors after having used the services would be positive, meaning they perceived values, they were satisfied, and they would repeat using the services. When the relationship of variables was examined with Structural Equation Model, it showed that all items were relevant reflective indicators of the latent. The impact of expected quality on the perceived quality was low, but the impact of perceived quality on the outcomes of using services was substantial. It can be concluded that the wellness spa industry in the Eastern region of Thailand has high growth potential. The region can be an international hub of health tourism with good management, good operation, and good services, along with attractive tourism resources in the region.

Keywords

health tourism, wellness spa industry, Eastern region of Thailand, expected service quality, perceived service quality, outcomes of using services

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Introduction

The statistical data compiled by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand reveal that tourism in Thailand is growing every year with increasing numbers of foreign and Thai tourists. Tourists from China, Malaysia, Korea, Laos, Japan, India, the USA, Singapore, and UK are on the top 10 of the list. It has been predicted that tourism in Thailand will continue to grow in the years to come. In terms of the revenue, it has been predicted that health tourism will generate revenues for community residents because there will be more tourists coming to experience health tourism in Thailand, and most of them are big spenders. (Mr. 362, 2018) This development has inspired the government of Thailand to come up with a policy to develop Thailand to become an international hub of health tourism, as Thailand has many regions with attractive components of health tourism. Some regions have waterfront cities, and others have hilly cities up on mountains in forests. Both waterfront cities and hilly cities on

mountains are both good locations for health tourism with good climate.

The growth of health and wellness businesses can be attributed to the fact that consumers in this age are suffering with tensions, anxieties, and insecurity; thus, they have to look for remedies for their psychological discomforts. In addition, consumers in this age also try to conduct their lives with work-life balance concept, which leads to their efforts to attain the state of wellness for quality of life. The term "wellness" encompasses 1) health and beauty, 2) nutrition, 3) spiritual ecstasy, 4) quality of life, 5) satisfaction with attractive body, and 6) good health without surgeries. These consumers regard the use of medical and wellness services as a way to reward themselves when professionals in a hygienic and well equipped place provide them with individual care. People in these days want to live longer with quality life. They want to be healthy without surgeries, and they want physical health, mental health, social health, and spiritual health. It should

be noted that these people are well-off and they are willing to pay premium prices for quality of life.

Key success factors of wellness business in Thailand are: 1) reasonable prices, 2) world-class quality services, 3) professional experts, 4) advanced technologies, 5) hospitality, and attractive tourism resources. Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports has announced that spa businesses which have been certified that they meet the prescribed standards are bed rocks of Thailand's health tourism. With the potential of growth, wellness spa businesses in Thailand must build loyalty among tourists who are looking for wellness spa services to retain customers. Thus it is necessary that entrepreneurs learn how tourists who use wellness spa services are satisfied with the services they have received from using wellness spa services in Thailand. This research has been conducted to find out tourists' satisfaction and defects to develop competitiveness of Thailand's wellness spa businesses.

Research Objectives

There are two objective of the research. They are as follows.

1. To study consumers' perceived satisfaction with services of spa business in Thailand
2. To recommend innovative strategic operations to raise the level of satisfaction

2. Literature Review

In this research the literature review includes 1) the general situation of health tourism, 2) various types of spa business, 3) marketing strategies for spa business, 4) spa operation with service mind, 5) SURQUAL model for service quality evaluation, and 6) the development of human resources in spa business.

The general situation of health tourism: At present, health tourism has gained popularity around the world: it is recognized as one of global mega trends. It is a major force that will change the way people live in the future. The announcement launched by Frost and Sullivan Company indicates that health, wellness, and well being will be a major trend of the world (Thaemngoen, 2015). Wellness and good health

will be sought after as an alternative way of life—the state of holistic health. The Global Wellness Institute (GWI), which is a world class institution studying and conducting researches on the global health industry stated that the size of the industry in 2015 was US \$3.7 billion. This amount is equivalent to 5% of the total global GDP. While the total global GDP decreased by 3.6%, the health industry increased by 10.6% GWI classifies health businesses into 10 categories: 1) beauty and anti-aging, 2) health eating, nutrition, and weight loss, 3) wellness tourism, 4) fitness and mind-body balance, 5) preventive and personalized medicine and public health, 6) complementary and alternative medicine, 7) wellness life style real estate, 8) spa economy, 9) thermal and mineral springs, and 10) workplace wellness.

2.1 Types of Business Spa

The Act of Service Business issued by the Ministry of Health in 2003 classifies spa businesses into 3 types (the Institution of SME Development, 2013). They are: 1) health spas with health care service, including massage therapy, aqua therapy, steaming therapy, exercise therapy, nutrition and diet control, meditation, herbal products for health, and alternative medicine, 2) massage spas with massages for relaxation, stress reduction, and other massage techniques without bathing facilities, and 3) massages for beautification in beauty salons with purposes to enhance customers' beauty without bathing facilities.

The International Spa Association: ISPA (1995) classifies spas into 7 types: 1) club spas with fitness and health care for members only 2) day spas with convenient locations 3) hotel and resort spas providing massage and fitness services in hotels and resorts, 4) cruise ship spas on cruises with various types of message, fitness services, and special diet programs for health, 5) mineral spring spas located in areas with hot springs or natural mineral water sources for aqua therapies, 6) destination spas located in areas where there are natural resources for holistic health care with healthy diets, exercises, weight loss, mind-body balance, and individual health improvement with long-period programs, and 7) medical spas with medical doctors and nurses to take care of customers who need medical services, beauty programs, nutritional programs for health and

weight loss, exercise training, massages, and other activities for health improvement. The definitions of various types of spa are overlapping and confusing; thus, in the year 2008, Thailand designates two types of spa: those with accommodation and those without accommodation.

As a spa business is a health business, it needs prescribed standards to ensure customers' safety. Unthong et. Al. (2016) described that the prescription for spa safety was issued and it emphasized the hygiene of products used in spas. The prescription is as follows.

1. Hygienic aspect: The premise must be clean. Products used in spas must be of high quality, bath rooms must be well sanitized. Details on this aspects are:
 - 1.1 Foreigners pay high attention to hygiene.
 - 1.2 The term "quality products" means they must be non-allergic.
2. For safety, entrepreneurs and employees must take precaution against any risk of electricity chocks as spa services consist of the use of water and electrical heat.
3. There must be a good plan of risk management, as many services in spa business are risky for health damages and safety of life.

2.2 Marketing Strategies for Spa Business

Regarding a marketing plan with tactical decisions concerning marketing mixes, the "people" mix is the most important marketing one to create competitive advantages. A marketing strategy for spa operation should include the following: 1) a spa menu with different treatments and massages for customers with different needs, 2) service designs to create impressive experiences for customers, including reasonable prices, appropriate communication, transaction methods and procedures, public relations, and employee training programs, 3) identifying competitive advantages, 4) delineating employees' roles and responsibilities, and 5) quality control measures. Lauterborn (1990) recommends innovative marketing mixes with 4 C's, which is conceived with consumers' point of view. They are: 1) consumer wants and needs, 2) consumer cost to satisfy the needs and wants, 3)

convenience to buy, and 4) communication that connects. With this 4 C's marketing mix, entrepreneurs can reach out to consumers better than the 4 P's marketing mix. Kotler and Keller (2012) recommend going beyond 4 P's by using the 7 P's marketing mix, namely 1) product, 2) price, 3) place, 4) promotion, 5) people, 6) process, and 7) physical evidence and presentation. For service businesses, including spa businesses, people and physical evidence are the most important marketing mixes to create impressive experiences for customers.

2.3 Spa Operation with Service Mind

From the findings of the researches by Cronin and Taylor (1992); Oliver (1993 ; and Ziethaml et al. (1985), it can be concluded that 3 elements of business operation with service mind are: 1) customer satisfaction, 2) service quality, and 3) customer value. Human resources working in service businesses must have the following characteristics: 1) being service minded and willing to assist customers for them to get impressive experiences, 2) having good external personality and internal psychological mindset with appropriate attires, good social manners, and good expressions, 3) having communication skills, interactive skills, and gregariousness.

Service mind means willingness to give services. SERVICE MIND as an acronym can be elaborated as follows:

S = smile: Employees who are service providers must always smile to express their friendliness and willingness to welcome customers. Smiling shows that they are ready to serve wholeheartedly.

E = enthusiasm: When employees are enthusiastic, it means they are eager to serve, they are well prepared, and they are responsible to help customers with their utmost efforts.

R = responsiveness: Employees should respond to consumers' requests and complaints promptly, politely, and willingly. They have to value customers' time, and react efficiently with appropriate measures.

V = value: Employees must have customer insights to know what customers expect to get from their services, and they have to meet or exceed the expectations, so that customers will perceive that what they gain is equivalent or above what they have to sacrifice. That means

customer value creation, which is very important in marketing.

I = impression: Employees as service providers must create impressive experiences the first minute customers enter the premise. They have to provide impressive experiences at all levels of moment of truth, including moment of communication, moment of interaction, moment of services, and moment of advocacy.

C = courtesy: Employees must be polite and humble. They must be willing to serve customers without being inferior, and do not think that giving services is subservient. Employees have to make customers feel valued and important.

E = endurance: Employees must be tolerant with customers' behaviors by considering that customers are valuable to sustain business growth. They have high EQ to control their temper and solve customers' complaints with reasons.

M = make believe: Employees must have faith in their occupation, service providing, and customer value creation. They must be happy when they help customers be happy. They must be proud of their responsibility and feel dignified to do the job.

I = insist: Employees must be assertive when they do the right thing. They have to learn how to negotiate with customers with polite and impressive manners without creating hard feelings. They must be able to give reason to justify their standing point when they believe that they are doing the right thing, and do things right. Nonetheless, they must be willing to apologize sincerely when they are wrong.

N = necessitate: Employees must realize that they have to serve all customers well, no matter who they are. They should not exercise any discriminative practices with customers. They should serve all customers with data-driven strategies to meet customers' needs, wants, tastes, and expectations.

D = devote: Employees must have ovation to work devotedly. They must be willing to assist customers. They should learn how to go beyond the call of duty to satisfy customers.

In conclusion, service providers must have knowledge and skills to do their jobs efficiently. They must be observant and enthusiastic with good manners, creativity, calmness, positive attitudes, and high emotion quotient (Wisanumahimachai (2008). To create customers' satisfaction, entrepreneurs must pay

high attention to human resource management, as it has been said that one cannot have happy customers without having happy employees. It should be noted that service providers are emotional labors; they have to be happy and be satisfied with their jobs for them to work well and make customers happy.

2.4 SERVQUAL Model for Service Quality Evaluation

SERVQUAL model is a tool to evaluate service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1990). There are five determinants of service quality. They are as follows.

1. Tangibles: This determinant consists of buildings, decors, facilities, atmospheres, and surroundings that impress customers who will derive good services from what they perceive with their five senses.

2. Reliability: This determinant means that service providers keep their promises and make no mistakes. Their performance is defect-free.

3. Responsiveness: This determinant means that service providers respond to customers' requests and complaints politely, promptly, and willingly. They must value customers' time.

4. Empathy: Employees must learn how to look at things from customers' points of view. They must have customer insights to understand customers' needs, wants, tastes, and expectations, so that they can serve customers accordingly, and satisfy customers.

5. Assurance: Employees must demonstrate that they have relevant knowledge and skills to do their jobs efficiently, so that customers feel assured and have confidence to receive services from them.

The SERVQUAL model also identifies 5 service gaps as follows.

1. Gap 1 is "customer gap"-- a gap between customers' expectations and entrepreneurs' misperceptions of customer expectations. This is caused by a lack of customer insights.
2. Gap 2 is "specification gap" — wrong specs due to entrepreneurs' misperceptions of customer expectations. This is a consequence of Gap 1. Wrong specs are also caused by a lack of customer

insights, which results in a wrong standard of service quality.

3. Gap 3 is “provider gap”—service providers do not deliver in accordance with customer expectations. Employees are not well trained to give good services that are up to customers’ expectations. Employees have not been informed of communication messages that create customers’ expectations, so they do not provide services up to customers’ expectations. This can cause customers’ disappointments and dissatisfaction.
4. Gap 4 is “communication gap”—services are not delivered as promised in marketing communications. Employees have not been informed of communication messages that create customers’ expectations, so they do not provide services up to customers’ expectations. This can cause customers’ disappointments and dissatisfaction. Internal marketing is needed to fill this gap.
5. Gap 5 is “discrepancy gap”—perceived services are below expected services. Customers have expectations prior to the time when they receive services. Their expectations come from last experiences, referrals from others, and marketing communications. After they have received services, they will form post-service attitudes according to their comparison between expected and perceived values. When expected values exceeds perceived values, Gap 5 incurs; thus, it is necessary that service providers know customers’ expectations, and three to meet or exceed customers’ expectations to fill the gap.

To impress customers and create satisfaction, entrepreneurs and service providers must make efforts to fill the gaps by learning customer expectations, having the right specs, providing services as promised, and making sure that services provided meet or exceed customer

expectations. Being able to fill all gaps will create satisfaction, which means making customers impressed, so that the business will be sustainable by retaining customers. In order to fill all the gaps, quality of human resources is important; therefore, entrepreneurs must have programs to develop human resources to provide quality services.

2.5 The Development of Human Resources in Spa Business

To attain a success in the spa business, it is necessary that human resources be well developed. Chuchakul (2011) states that the service providers in spa businesses must have the following traits: 1) being professional, 2) being honest, 3) having ethical behaviors. They must also have specific core competency, including 1) being interested in health development, 2) having passion for spa business, 3) being able to find a good location for the business and recognizing good ambience for spa services, 4) being knowledgeable and skillful in spa management, 5) always keeping up with current trends of spa business, 6) keeping up with products and technologies used in spa business, 7) being capable of human resource development to make them be able to give good services to tourists, 8) having masseurs and masseuses who have massage expertise to provide relevant quality services, 9) being aware of the significance of spa ambience to create impressive customer experiences, and 10) being creative to come up with innovative augmented services to differentiate the business.

Entrepreneurs in spa business must embrace innovation to create impressive customer experiences to build customer loyalty and gain referrals from loyal customers who will become brand advocates when they, as customers 4.0 are likely to report their experiences online. In order for them to be good service providers, human resources in spa business should be cultivated to develop and retain relationship with customers in accordance with the principles of customer relationship management—CRM, which is the marketing strategy to create brand loyalty. Customers who have good relationship with service providers are likely to become loyal customers who will come to repeat their purchases. Not only do they repeat their purchases, but they will also refer the services to others. This will result in sustainable business

with continuous growth. To impress customers is very important in the digital age because customers will report their experiences online. If they are satisfied with the services, they will become advocates for the business that impresses them. It should be noted that digital consumers believe contents they receive from their virtual friends in social networks. Katsiaryna (2017) studied health tourism in Slovenia to assert that Slovenia is well equipped to be developed as a spa, wellness, and health tourism destination for the Russian market. The findings reveal that Slovenia has potential to be health tourism destination for Russian tourists. The problems are 1) employees do not have sufficient knowledge and skills of services, 2) entrepreneurs lack management competence, and service quality is not worth the money. The author concludes that quality must be improved in all aspects, including service providers, ambience of the premise, management competence, products, and being friendly to macro-environments. The concept of sustainability must be applied when developing wellness spa business, as it is a global trend, and many customers will not support businesses that do not comply with the principles of sustainability, which is the manifestation of corporate social responsibility and good governance.

Lagrosen (2016) studied customer perception of quality of the spa industry, and the findings reveal that dimensions of customers' perception are impacts of physical evidence, psychological impacts, happiness, and relaxation. Elements of expectations are quality services and spa ambience. Criteria to evaluate satisfaction are pleasures, therapeutic treatments, service providers' behaviors, prices, and tranquility of the premise. Lee and Kim (2015) examined factors affecting customers' decisions in health tourism. The respondents in the study were those involved in health tourism, including public officers, private entrepreneurs, and tourists who visit wellness spa destinations. The findings reveal that the factors are 1) traveling distance (location of the business), expenses, service providers' language proficiency, economic conditions, medical technologies and competency, and culture. Lertluckathanatarn (2016) studied factors affecting the promotion of health tourism among foreign tourists who visited Thailand for health services. The findings reveal that there are 9 key

factors for health tourism development. They are: 1) spa services, 2) herbal products, 3) sports, 4) therapeutic treatments, 5) message programs, 6) accommodations, 7) tourism attractions in the area, 8) service quality, and 9) practices that comply with the principles of sustainability.

3. Research Method

3.1 Process of the Research

The process of this research consists of the following procedures.

1. The researchers used documentary research and literature review to identify the relevant variables to study customer satisfaction with services in spa businesses. The variables are: product and physical evidence, place, promotion, process, and people. The five determinants of service quality were also included; they are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The relationships between variables were also examined. Expectation was designated to be the independent variable, perception was designated to be the intervening variable, and satisfaction as the result of using spa services was designated to be the dependent variable. The questions were: 1) what is the perceived value of services that leads to consumers' satisfaction? , and 2) what is their intention to repeat visiting the respective spas?

1. Variables in the study were operationally defined for quantifiable measurement.
2. Relationships between designated variables were tested to verify hypotheses.
3. Relationships between designated variables were arranged in a model that explained the relationship among independent, intervening, and dependent variables.
4. The model was presented as an approach to create customers' satisfaction in wellness spa business.

3.2 Population and Samples

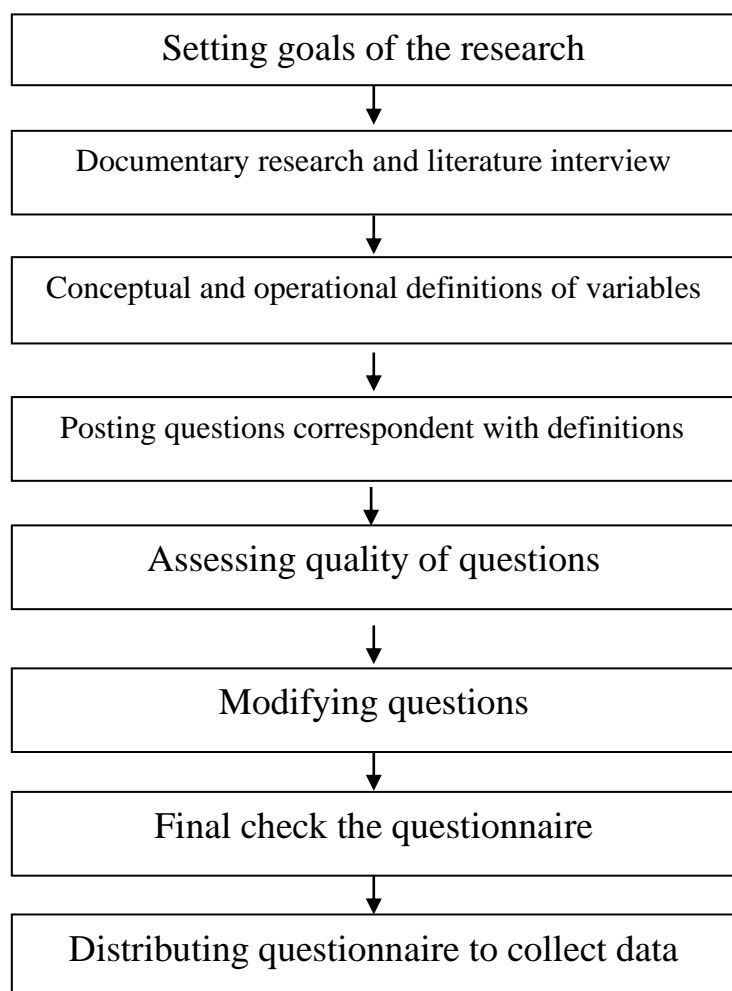
The respondents of the research were tourists using spa services in spas located in Chonburi, Rayong, Chantaburi, and Trad. The sample of 460 respondents was randomly selected from tourists using services at spas in the four provinces with multistage sampling. The first stage was cluster sampling and the second stage is systematic sampling.

3.3 Items of Study

Items studied in this research were reflective indicators of variables of study, which were 1) product, 2) physical evidence, 3) place, 4) process, 5) people, 6) promotion, 7 tangibles, 8) reliability, 9) responsiveness, 10) assurance, and 11) empathy. Twenty items were used to measure satisfaction, and 3 items were used to measure future intention. Three main variables to study were expectations as an independent variable, perceived value as an intervening variable, and result of using spa services as a dependent variable.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research instrument employed in this study was a structured questionnaire that was developed with several stages as follows.



3.5 Data Analysis

The variables to be analyzed were 1) uses of services in spas, 2) perception of service values, and 3) satisfaction as the result of using services. The respondents included both young customers and senior customers who were health conscious. The topics to be analyzed

consisted of the following: 1) satisfaction with products used in spas, 2) satisfaction with the ambiances of spas, 3) perceived quality of spa services of spas and management. Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used to examine relationships among the three main variables of the study.

Research Findings

Table 1: Demographics of the Respondents

| Data | Frequencies | Percentages |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Gender | | |
| 1. Female | 324 | 50.9 |
| 2. Male | 296 | 46.5 |
| 3. No answers | 16 | 2.5 |
| | - | - |
| 2. Education | | |
| 1. Bachelor's Degree | 322 | 50.5 |
| 2. High school and lower | 93 | 14.6 |
| 3. Master's Degree | 84 | 13.2 |
| 4. Vacation Associate Degree | 65 | 10.2 |
| 5. Vocation Certificate | 53 | 8.3 |
| 6. Doctoral Degree | 14 | 2.2 |
| 7. Others | 6 | .9 |

The sample consisted of more female respondents than male respondents, with some of them not willing to answer the question on gender. It is possible that they belong to the LGBTQ group, which is growing in these days due to the growth of human rights and dignity. Most of them had bachelor's degrees. It can be inferred that health tourism customers are highly educated, and they belong to middle to upper income groups. This is correspondent with the current situation of health tourism, which shows that wealthy and educated consumers are more health conscious, and they are willing to pay premium prices for wellness spa services to gain quality of life. It is reasonable and justifiable for many countries to attempt to be hubs of health tourism, as this type of tourism can generate high income of tourism

sector, which is an important machine for economic growth and security of many countries around the world.

Table 2: Behaviors of Using Spa Services (multiple answers allowed)

| Services | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Types of Services | |
| 1. Thai massages | 51.7 |
| 2. Aromatic massages | 32.6 |
| 3. Foot massages | 24.6 |
| 4. Face scrub | 22.7 |
| 5. shoulder massages | 16.2 |
| 6. Body scrub | 14.8 |
| 7. Body shaping | 7.4 |
| 8. Others | 2.8 |
| Reasons | |
| 1. Prices | 63.6 |
| 2. Brand Image | 43.3 |
| 3. Safety | 41.5 |
| 4. Products used in a spa | 39.0 |
| 5. Certification of Service Standards | 39.0 |
| 6. Convenient locations | 31.0 |
| 7. Hygiene | 22.4 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 8. Others | .9 |
| Sources of Awareness | |
| 1. Friends and relatives | 38.0 |
| 2. Internet | 32.2 |
| 3. Social media | 27.7 |
| 4. Tour organizers | 25.2 |
| 5. Others | 1.3 |

The respondents used a variety of services in spas, and the top 5 services used were Thai massages, aromatic massages, foot massages, face scrubs, and shoulder massages. The findings pointed out that Thailand was famous for a variety of massages, and tourists visited spas for beauty treatments too. The top three reasons for selecting which spa to use were prices, brand image, and safety. This indicates that entrepreneurs must perceive the importance of brand image building. Tourists who visited spas also looked for spas with a variety of products, certified standards of services, and convenient locations. Friends and relatives ranked first as sources of information about spas. Internet platforms and social media platforms were also very important. The findings also pointed out that tour guides could be helpful for spa recommendations.

Table 3: Paired-sample t-test) between Expectations (E) and Perceptions (P)

| Constructs | Items | Means | | Gap (P-E) | t | p |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| | | E | P | | | |
| Tangibles | | | | | | |
| 1. | Beautiful designs and decors | 4.60 | 5.13 | 0.53 | 11.89 | < .001 |
| 2. | Hygienic standards | 4.65 | 5.16 | 0.50 | 10.30 | < .001 |
| 3. | Variety of products | 4.67 | 5.21 | 0.55 | 10.76 | < .001 |
| 4. | Well groomed employees | 4.83 | 5.41 | 0.57 | 11.44 | < .001 |
| 5. | Serene place | 4.72 | 5.31 | 0.59 | 11.29 | < .001 |
| 6. | Variety of choices | 4.71 | 5.28 | 0.57 | 11.12 | < .001 |
| 7. | Well equipped with modern technology | 4.69 | 5.24 | 0.55 | 10.94 | < .001 |
| 8. | Comfortable room | 4.70 | 5.25 | 0.55 | 11.04 | < .001 |
| 9. | Surrounded with beautiful nature | 4.70 | 5.26 | 0.56 | 11.43 | < .001 |
| 10. | Good food and beverage services | 4.68 | 5.28 | 0.60 | 12.58 | < .001 |
| 11. | Ample parking spaces | 4.69 | 5.26 | 0.56 | 10.94 | < .001 |
| 12. | Convenient location | 4.72 | 5.27 | 0.55 | 11.18 | < .001 |
| | Total | 4.70 | 5.26 | 0.56 | 14.37 | < .001 |
| Reliability | | | | | | |
| 1. | Excellent Thai massages | 4.60 | 5.11 | 0.51 | 11.46 | < .001 |
| 2. | Reasonable prices | 4.69 | 5.20 | 0.51 | 10.15 | < .001 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| 3. | Good brand image | 4.70 | 5.24 | 0.54 | 10.74 | < .001 |
| 4. | Confirmed | 4.72 | 5.28 | 0.56 | 10.58 | < .001 |
| 5. | Accurate and adequate information | 4.75 | 5.32 | 0.57 | 11.54 | < .001 |
| 6. | Uniqueness | 4.73 | 5.27 | 0.54 | 10.84 | < .001 |
| 7. | Services with high quality | 4.82 | 5.34 | 0.52 | 9.86 | < .001 |
| 8. | Answering to my needs | 4.84 | 5.35 | 0.51 | 9.65 | < .001 |
| | Total | 4.73 | 5.26 | 0.53 | 13.24 | < .001 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Responsiveness | | | | | | |
| 1. | Helpful employees | 4.72 | 5.33 | 0.61 | 12.01 | < .001 |
| 2. | No long waiting time | 4.77 | 5.27 | 0.50 | 10.20 | < .001 |
| 3. | Free augmented service | 4.66 | 5.20 | 0.54 | 11.02 | < .001 |
| | Total | 4.72 | 5.27 | 0.55 | 13.18 | < .001 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Responsiveness | | | | | | |
| 1. | Well trained employees | 4.77 | 5.28 | 0.51 | 9.70 | < .001 |
| 2. | Employees with good communication skills. | 4.69 | 5.25 | 0.56 | 10.74 | < .001 |
| 3. | Knowledgeable employees | 4.79 | 5.32 | 0.53 | 9.92 | < .001 |
| | Total | 4.75 | 5.29 | 0.53 | 12.20 | < .001 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------|----------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Empathy | | | | | | |
| 1. | Friendly services. | 4.73 | 5.28 | 0.56 | 11.04 | < .001 |
| 2. | Zero mistake service | 4.71 | 5.26 | 0.56 | 10.60 | < .001 |
| 3. | Customized services | 4.72 | 5.32 | 0.59 | 12.17 | < .001 |
| 4. | Innovative services | 4.70 | 5.26 | 0.55 | 10.75 | < .001 |
| | Total | 4.72 | 5.28 | 0.56 | 13.21 | < .001 |

Note: 1.00-2.20 = very small, 2.21-3.40 = small, 3.41-4.60 = moderate,

4.61-5.80 = large, 5.81-7.00 = very large

Tangibles: The mean of expected quality of tangibles was 4.70, while the perceived quality was 5.26. When being considered by item, the mean of expected beautiful designs and decors was 4.60, and the mean of expected well groomed employees was 4.83. The mean of perceived beautiful designs and decors was 5.13, and the mean of perceived well groomed employees was 5.41. Regarding tangibles, the findings showed that perceived qualities of all items exceeded expected qualities. Thus, it could be referred that tourists would be satisfied with the ambience of spas they visited.

Reliability: The mean of expected reliability was 4.73, and the mean of perceived reliability was 5.26. When being considered by item, the mean of expected excellent Thai massages was 4.60, and the mean of perceived

excellent Thai massages was 5.11. The mean of expected answering to my needs was 4.84, and the mean of perceived answering to my needs was 5.35, which was high. Regarding reliability, the findings also showed that perceived qualities of all items exceeded expected qualities. This could lead to customers' satisfaction with the employees who were service providers.

Responsiveness: The mean of expected responsiveness was 4.72, and the mean of perceived responsiveness was 5.27. When being considered by item, the mean of expected free augmented services was 4.66, and the mean of perceived free augmented services was 5.20. The mean of expected helpful employees was 4.77, and the mean of perceived helpful employees was 5.33. Regarding responsiveness, perceived qualities of all items exceeded expected qualities. This could be referred that employees who were service providers responded to customers' requests and complaints in due time. They performed their duties willingly, and they made tourists believe that they valued customers' time.

Assurance: The mean of expected assurance was 4.75, and the mean perceived assurance was 5.29. When being considered by item, the mean of expected employees having good interaction skills was 4.69, and the mean of perceived employees having good interaction skills was 5.2. The mean of expected employees being knowledgeable was 4.79, and the mean of perceived employees being knowledgeable was 5.25. Regarding assurance, perceived qualities of all items exceeded expected qualities. This implied that employees who were service providers had been well trained. They demonstrated their expertise, especially their skills of giving massages. The fact that they have been certified by the Ministry of Health could be a key factor that makes tourists feel assured that will get good services.

Empathy: The mean of expected empathy was 4.72, and the mean of perceived empathy was 5.28. When being considered by item, the mean of expected innovative services was 4.70, and the mean of perceived innovative services was 5.26, which was also high. The mean of expected

friendly services was 4.73, and the mean of perceived friendly services was 5.26. Regarding empathy, perceived qualities of all items exceeded expected qualities. This showed that employees who were service providers had profound customer insights. They knew customers' need, wants, tastes, and expectations. By being empathetic, service providers made tourists perceive them as professional workers who knew how to please them. This could lead to relationship development customer franchise.

It can be concluded from the findings that respondents' expected quality of services was high for all determinants of service quality. The perceived quality of services was much higher, and it exceeded their expected quality of services. Thus it can be predicted that the outcomes of using spa services in the Eastern region of Thailand will lead to satisfaction and other positive behaviors, including repeating visits. The relationship between perceived quality of services and tourists' satisfaction with spa services was examined, and the findings were as follows.

Table 4: Top 5 Popular Services

| Services | Percentages of Uses |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Thai traditional massages | 54 |
| 2 Aromatic massages | 34 |
| 3 Foot massages | 26 |
| 4 Face massages/scrubbing | 24 |
| 5 Head and shoulder massages | 17 |

Among all types of massage, Thai traditional massage is the most popular service, followed by aromatic massage. Among the top 5 popular services, face massage and scrubbing is the only service for beauty. It is not a service for health and

relaxation, while the other four popular services are for health and relaxation. Though wellness spa businesses should provide holistic health and beauty services, it is obvious that health services were more important.

Table 5: Relationship between Uses of Top 5 Services and Perceived Quality of

| Perceived Quality | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Services | Low | Moderate | High |
| 1. Thai traditional massages | 27% | 42% | 31% |
| 2. Aromatic massages | 20% | 52% | 28% |
| 3. Foot Massages | 38% | 38% | 24% |
| 4. Face massages and scrubbing | 31% | 42% | 26% |
| 5. Head/shoulder massages | 34% | 44% | 22% |

It is obvious that popularity of services is related to levels of perceived quality. The data reveal that 31% of tourists who use Thai traditional massages--the most popular service, perceive high quality, and 42% perceive moderate quality. The

second popular kind of massage is aromatic massage, and 28% of the respondents perceive high quality. The third popular type is foot massage, and 24% of the respondents perceive high quality. The fourth popular type is face massages and scrubbing; 26% of the respondents

perceive high quality of this type. For head /shoulder massages--the fifth among the top 5 popular services, only 22% perceive high quality. More than 60% of the respondents perceived all of the top 5 popular services to have high or moderate quality. It can be concluded that the higher rank of popularity of a service, the higher quality it will be perceived.

Table 6: The Relationship between Perceived Quality and Outcomes of Uses

| Outcomes of Uses | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| | Perceived Value | Satisfaction | Intention to Repeat |
| Perceived Quality | 0.702** | 0.716** | 0.714** |

** = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data revealed that perceived quality is relating to three outcomes of uses—perceived value, satisfaction, and intention to repeat visits. The correlation between perceived quality and perceived value is 0.702. The correlation between perceived quality and satisfaction is 0.716. The correlation between perceived quality and intention to repeat is 0.714. All of the relationships are statistically significant at 0.01.

Satisfaction has the highest correlation at 0.716, intention to repeat has the second highest correlation at 0.714. The correlation scores of the three are very close. The findings indicated that perceived quality affected perceived value, satisfaction, and intention to repeat; thus, it is obvious that perceived quality is a key factor to build customer loyalty. Entrepreneurs of wellness spa business have to pay high attention to all determinants of quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. All employees must be well trained to perform their duties to manifest that they make their utmost efforts to provide quality services with the five determinants of quality.

The Examination of the Relationship between Perceived Service Quality and Future Behaviors

Three constructs indicating tourists' future behaviors in this study were 1) perceived value, 2) satisfaction, and intention to repeat uses. The mean of perceived value was 5.22. That of satisfaction was 5.31, and that of intention to repeat uses was also 5.31. All of the means were high. It can be concluded that when the respondents' perceived quality of services exceeded expected quality of services, their future behaviors were likely to be positive. When the relationships among the variables were examined with SEM, the details of the model are as follows:

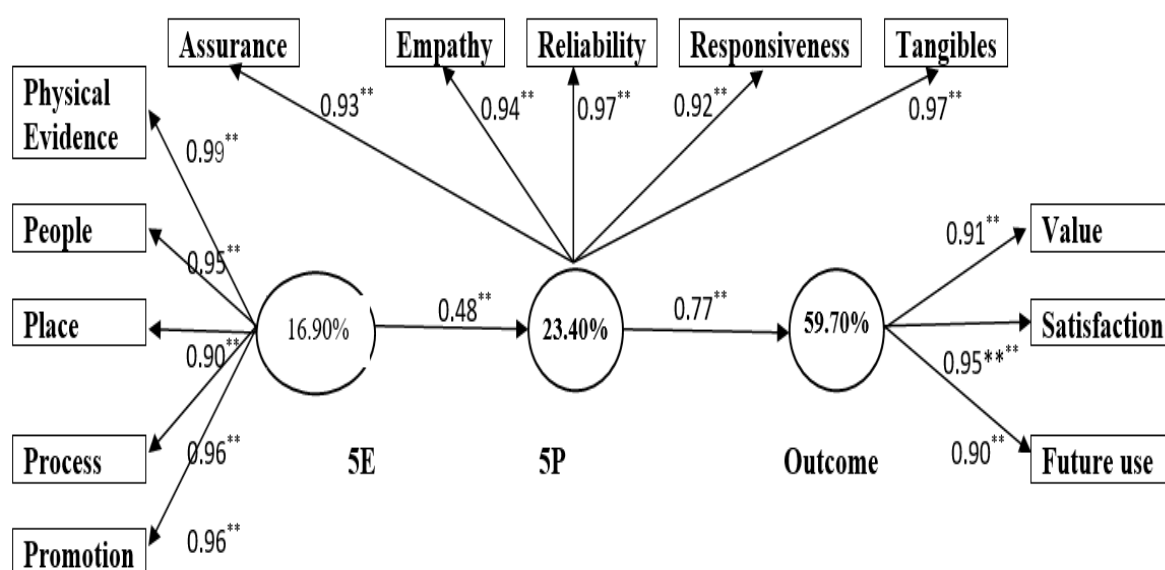


Figure 1: The Relationships among

Expectations, 5 Perceptions, and Outcomes

The model shows that the observed variables, namely marketing mixes and service quality determinants, were good reflective indicators of their respective latent. The impact of the latent of 5 expectations on the latent of 5 perceptions was 0.48, which was low. On the contrary, the impact of the latent of 5 perceptions on the latent of outcomes was 0.77, which was substantially high. The relationships of the variables in the model confirmed the hypothesis that perceived service quality had impacts on outcomes of using spa services, namely perceived values, satisfaction, and intention to repeat in the future. The findings indicated clearly that perceived quality that was higher than expected quality was a key factor to create satisfaction and loyalty. Entrepreneurs and employees must have insights of customers' expectations, so that they could provide services with quality exceeding customers' expectations. It is obvious that, when customers perceive high value of services, they will be satisfied, and they will become loyalty. When customers are loyal, the business will be secure and continuously growing.

Discussion

Tourists who use spa services in the Eastern region of Thailand are rather opulent with high purchasing power, and they are willing to pay premium prices for good health and quality of life. They want holistic wellness, including health, beauty, and anti-aging treatments. The provinces in the Eastern region of Thailand have tourism resources to render impressive tourism experiences to tourists. Attractive tourism resources can be leveraged as augmented products to provide added value for tourists who visit Thailand for wellness spa services. This is very essential for any destination that wants to attain the status of an international hub of health tourism; thus, it is safe to say that tourism pleasures are values added for tourists who visit the region for wellness services. Since they are opulent tourists, they are likely to stay in five-star hotels. Having well known wellness spa resources is a good measure to generate high income for the country as well as the residents in the region. Upper class tourists have ample time to enjoy wellness services, including massages for relaxation and special massages for specific health

and beauty purposes. Entrepreneurs in the wellness industry must be creative to conceive innovative wellness programs to answer to their needs. The programs must include exercises for physical health. Face and body treatments for face and body beauty, including weight loss and weight control. There must be special diet programs for weight control and physical health. There must be soothing meditation for mental health. There must be religious rituals for spiritual health. There must be social activities for social health. There must be anti-aging treatments for rejuvenation. As for beauty programs, the treatments must include skin cares, weight loss, and body shaping.

It must be noted that factors relating to tourists' satisfaction with wellness spa services are: 1) variety of massages for relaxation, therapy, and beauty, 2) medical programs for physical and mental health, 3) special diet programs for nutrition and weight loss, 4) service minded employees with gentle Thainess, 5) unique innovative spa products from local herbs, 6) natural ambience and beautiful decors with traditional Thai arts, 7) augmented services, such as sightseeing tours and group exercises, and 8) good operational management.

The expected service quality among tourists who use wellness spa services was high. After they had used the services, their perceived service quality was even higher. As their perceived service quality exceeded their expected service quality, the outcomes of their using wellness services were all positive. They perceived that services they received rendered values for money. They were satisfied with the services. They were willing to repeat using the services. It is obvious that tourists' satisfaction can be attributed to good management and well trained employees who are knowledgeable, skillful, service minded, and friendly.

Having well trained employees with massage expertise is a feature to differentiate Thailand's wellness spa services; therefore, all masseurs and masseuses must be well trained. The training programs should be organized by the Ministry of health offices, and they should be programs that confer certification to people who have been trained. It should be noted that having certified masseurs and masseuses is a key factor to make tourists feel assured to use services. As Thailand's wellness spa business is well known

for a variety of massages, entrepreneurs should try to come up with special massages that are catering to different niches of the market, such as after-golf massage, after jet lag massage, and some therapeutic massages. Each niche massage must have stories and legends to create value added. This must be done based on the principles of content marketing, as consumers in these days are content-driven consumers. They are mobilized by compelling contents.

It should also be noted that employees' language proficiency is also very important. Customers want to receive services from employees who can communicate with them fluently. The most essential language is English, and Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian are other essential languages. Language training should be provided by government agencies as certified public programs, and on-the-job training must also be provided entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

The wellness spa industry in the Eastern part of Thailand has high growth potential with holistic wellness spa services and augmented services. With many attractive tourism resources and premium accommodations in the region, all of the provinces in the Eastern part of Thailand are well equipped to welcome health tourists who are opulent and willing to pay premium prices for wellness spa services, as they are more health conscious and want quality of life. With excellent services, customized services, innovative spa products, and innovative wellness spa programs, entrepreneurs in the wellness industry of Thailand can create uniqueness to differentiate their services, and build brand equity. With good services that exceed customers' expectation, they can satisfy customers and create customer loyalty. The findings state clearly that with perceived service quality exceeding expected service quality, tourists are likely to perceive values with intention to come back.

Recommendation

As tourists in this digital age are likely to report their experiences online, satisfied tourists will become advocates for the wellness industry in the Eastern part of Thailand. It is recommended that entrepreneurs communicate with customers with contents correspondent with the 5 A's of customer journey, including the following.

1. **Awareness:** Entrepreneurs must provide contents about their business, their spa product, their services, and other augmented products they offer to tourists. They should provide contents to make the region an attractive place for health tourism as well as recreation tourism. They must tell tourists who are seeking wellness spa services that tourists can enjoy recreational tourism when they come for health tourism in the region. They have to let tourists know that they provide holistic wellness spa services. Health services should include physical health without illness, mental health with a peaceful mind, social health with emotion security, and spiritual health with self efficacy. Beauty services include facial treatments, body treatments, skin cares, weight loss and weight control. Anti-aging services include special supplementary diets and medical treatment.
2. **Appeal:** The contents to create appeal must tell features that are points of difference to create particularity for wellness spa services of Thailand. Points of difference to be featured are herbal products, expertise of massage among masseurs and masseuses, courteous service with Thainess characteristics, and tourism resources. Wellness spa services of Thailand should be presented as an integral part of health tourism of the country, and this should be coupled with recreational tourism. Tourists should be informed that Thailand is well equipped with all the elements to constitute excellent wellness spa services.
3. **Ask:** In this digital age, engagement marketing is an essential strategy to attract consumers. Contents that are provided in social media platforms should provoke conversation. They should inspire consumers to participate in social conversation. It is important that employees converse to interact with customers, give them information, and answer their questions. It is also

important to leverage digital influencers by interacting with them, asking them to give opinions, to review wellness spa services they have received, and inviting them to be bloggers to give positive reviews of wellness spa services they have received.

4. **Act:** Promotional incentives should be offered to expedite customers' decisions to use wellness spa services. Award, certifications, letters of complement, messages from digital influencers should be used to assure customers that they make right decisions. Brand equity, brand image, and brand reputation can be used to make customers feel confident to use the services.
5. **Advocate:** The final stage of customer journey is when they are satisfied with wellness spa services they have received, and they report their experiences on social media platforms. With positive comments, these digital influencers will become brand advocates. Not only can digital influencers be brand advocates, but any virtual friends on social media who write compelling contents can also be brand advocates. It is important that customers be satisfied with the services they have received for them to become brand advocates.

By applying the 5 A's of customer journey, entrepreneurs will promote their wellness spa businesses efficiently and effectively. As Thailand has high potential to become an international hub of health business, entrepreneurs in the wellness spa industry must learn how to leverage all the elements available to create brand equity of Thailand's wellness and spa industry. Satisfaction is a key for repeat and refer; therefore, entrepreneurs must make utmost efforts to satisfy customers who will become brand advocates.

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