การวัดคุณภาพการให้บริการของโรงแรม: กรณีศึกษาของโรงแรมขนาดกลางในกรุงเทพมหานคร

MEASURING HOTEL SERVICE QUALITY: A CASE STUDY OF MIDSCALE BANGKOK HOTELS

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บทคัดย่อ

โรงแรมระดับ 3 และ ระดับ 4 ดาว ซึ่งจัดเป็นโรงแรมขนาดกลาง (midscale hotels) สร้าง
อัตราผลตอบแทนต่อการลงทุนที่สูงกว่ากลุ่มโรงแรมขนาดอื่นๆในกรุงเทพมหานคร อย่างไรก็ตามโรงแรม
ขนาดกลางเหล่านี้ก็ยังประสบปัญหาจากจำนวนผู้ประกอบการโรงแรมที่มากกว่าความต้องการของลูกค้า
และการขาดความแตกต่างที่ชัดเจนทางด้านผลิตภัณฑ์ ดังนั้น ผู้บริหารโรงแรมขนาดกลาง ควรใช้แนวคิด
คุณภาพการให้บริการ เพื่อสร้างความได้เปรียบทางการแข่งขัน โดยการให้บริการที่เหนือกว่าระหว่างความ
คาดหวังของลูกค้า

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้ใช้ทฤษฎี SERVQUAL เพื่อวัดคุณภาพการให้บริการของโรงแรม โดยใช้กรณี
ศึกษาของโรงแรมขนาดกลางในกรุงเทพมหานคร ผลการวิจัยพบว่าคุณภาพการให้บริการที่ได้รับจริงอยู่ใน
ระดับสูงกว่าความคาดหวังของคุณภาพการให้บริการและความแตกต่างดังกล่าวอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ โดยรูป
ลักษณ์ทางกายภาพ (tangibles) ของโรงแรมขนาดกลาง เหนือความคาดหวังของลูกค้ามากที่สุด ส่วนการ
ให้ความมั่นใจ (assurance) และการดูแลเอาใจใส่ (empathy) ของโรงแรมขนาดกลาง เหนือความคาดหวัง
ของลูกค้าน้อยที่สุด

คำสำคัญ: คุณภาพการให้บริการ ทฤษฎี SERVQUAL โรงแรมขนาดกลาง กรุงเทพมหานคร

Abstract

Midscale hotels, generally known as three and four star hotels, provide a high return-on-in-
vestmentwhen compared to other hotel categories in Bangkok. Nonetheless, the midscale hotel
segment in Bangkok is highly oversupplied due to its lack of product differentiation. To gain
a competitive advantage, it is crucial for executives at midscale Bangkok hotels to understand
 the concept of service quality and be able to exceed customer's expectation towards service
quality.

Using the SERVQUAL concept, this research aims to measure the hotel service quality,
using midscale hotels in Bangkok as a case study. Findings suggest that there are significant
positive gaps in service quality delivered by midscale hotels in Bangkok, whereby those hotels
have exceeded their customers' expectations. Although 'tangibles' has the highest positive gap,
it should be pointed out however that 'assurance' and 'em athy' are two of the least positive
gaps.

Keywords: Service Quality, SERVQUAL, Midscale Hotel, Bangkok

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the major export services of Thailand accounting for around 7 percent of the country's GDP which generates over 550 billion Baht (nearly USD 16 billion) of revenue (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2016). In turn, a growth of the tourism industry is a crucial component of the Thai economy (Brassett & Watson, 2010), as illustrated below.
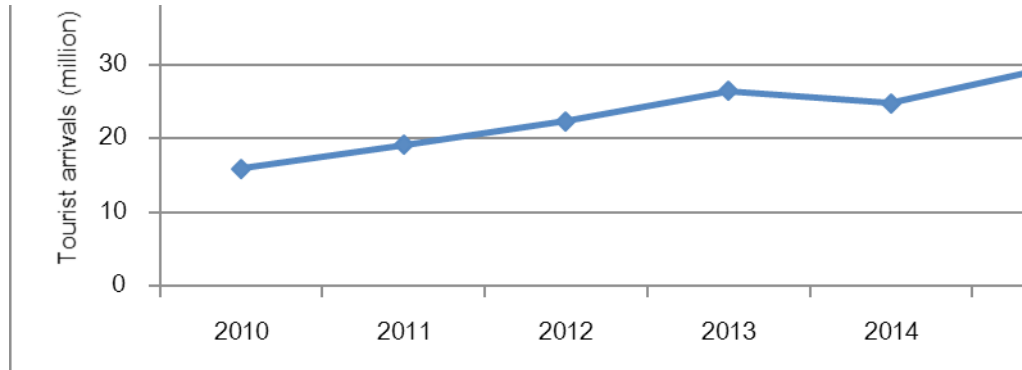

Figure 1: International tourist arrivals to Thailand 2010-2015
Source: Department of Tourism (2016)

The hotel industry is one of the most important parts of Thailand's tourism industry. Although the luxury hotel sector continues to be the focus of development, there is an increasing interest among developers in Thailand's midscale hotel segment (Hotel News Now, 2013). Midscale hotels, also known as three and four star hotels (STR, 2013), generally provide higher rate of return (Langdon, 2013) and have a higher occupancy rates (JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group, 2016b) when compared to other hotel categories in Bangkok.

However, Bangkok midscale hotels have faced an oversupply situation (Langdon, 2013) mainly due to midscale hotels' lack of real product differentiation and unique selling points (Pathnadabutr, 2012). In 2016, for instance, over 1,300 new hotel rooms entered the Bangkok hotel market. The majority of new supply is highly concentrated in the midscale hotel segment (JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group, 2016a).

Furthermore, midscale travelers are price sensitive, but look for good quality and value for money. Hence, attracting and maintaining the loyalty of midscale hotel customers is more difficult than other hotel segments (Tselepidakis, 2013) particularly because midscale hotels do not have customer's brand loyalty and repeat visits like established five-star hotels (Pathnadabutr, 2012).

In a highly competitive hotel industry, service is one of the most important elements to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. It is vital for hotel managers to understand how customers perceive the quality of service. This is the main reason why the SERVQUAL concept has been widely used in various service industries (Markovic & Raspor, 2010) in order to examine the differences, or 'gaps', between customers' expectations regarding the performance of service providers and the customers' assessment of the actual performance (Seyanont, 2007).

Although a number of studies (e.g. Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata, 2002; Motlagh et. al., 2013; Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2011) have investigated service quality gaps in the hotel industry, there is a lack of studies focusing specifically in the context of midscale hotels, which is one of the fast-growing hotel sectors in Bangkok. This supports Rauch et al. (2015)'s statement that customer perceptions of service quality in mid-scale hotels have largely been ignored, as most studies have focused on the upscale (4-star) and luxury (5-star) hotel segments.

In addition, a number of authors have not focused on an understanding customer perceptions of quality in a mid-scale hotel segment, as guests seeking more moderately priced accommodations are motivated primarily by price versus quality. However it should be pointed that customers also determine the perceived value, which is a higher-level construct influenced by perceived price and perceived quality (Rauch et al., 2015).

To examine such an issue, this research aims to determine gaps between customer expectations and perceptions toward midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality. In turn, the following hypotheses are developed and presented below:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between customers' demographic profiles and customer expectations toward midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between customers' demographic profiles and customer perceptions toward midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality.
- H3: There are significant service quality gaps between customer expectations and perceptions toward midscale Bangkok hotels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of SERVQUAL was adopted in this research. In general, SERVQUAL is a model based on five service quality dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This set of five dimensions is further subdivided into two sets of questions. The first set questions measures customer expectations prior to service delivery. The second set of questions measures the perceptions (attitudes) of customers about the delivered service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The most widely used instrument for measuring perception is a Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' (Blei et al., 2011). For each item, a gap score = P − E, where P and E are the ratings on the corresponding perception and expectation statements, respectively (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In turn, a gap score can be both positive and negative. To further understand the concept of service quality in the hotel and tourism contexts, the following relevant studies have been reviewed.

Vatjanasaregagul (2007) studied the relationship of service quality, consumer decision factors and brand equity. Using data collected from five and four stars hotels in Thailand, this study indicated that there was no statistical difference between the expectation and perception of service quality of Thai hotels on all five SERVQUAL dimensions.

Some studies have found that guest's expectations were higher than their perception of service quality. Blešiš et. al., (2011), for instance, employed SERVQUAL to measure service quality in spa hotels. The research was conducted at three-star hotels, which are located in the most visited spa centers in Serbia. Results showed that guests are not generally satisfied with

hotel services. Their expectations were higher than their perceptions of quality services in all factors, except the factor of 'empathy', where the positive value of the gap is the result of low expectations.

Moreover, Boon-itt & Rompho (2012) conducted a study focusing on hotel service quality based on the SERVQUAL model by comparing the boutique and the business hotel in Thailand and to understand the expectations, perceptions and gaps between expectations and perceptions regarding hotel service quality. The analysis showed that the service quality of hotels in Thailand was moderately low. Hotels were not able to deliver services as expected. The customer expectation of the services of the boutique hotels was also higher than that of the business hotels.

On the other hand, there are certain cases that the perception towards service quality is higher than the expectation. For example, Sriyam (2010) examined the customer satisfaction towards service quality of front office staff at one of the midscale hotels in Pattaya, Thailand. Using SERVQUAL, the findings of this study showed the highest level of customer expectation was assurance, while the highest level of customer perception was tangibility. The finding showed that the hotel customers' perceived service performance exceeded customer expectations towards the service quality of front office staff.

METHODOLOGY

The target population is customers staying at midscale hotels in Bangkok. Samples are Thai and foreign customers who stayed at four midscale hotels in Bangkok from December 2013 to March 2014. This research has adopted Skaliotis & Süf (2006)'s definition of midscale hotel as 3 and 4 star hotels with 100-200 rooms.

As only a few hotels in Thailand have an official star rating, and some ratings were rated by hotels themselves (Travel Center Asia, 2016), the official number of customers staying at midscale hotels in Bangkok could not be determined. Therefore, this research has utilized Taro Yamane's Table (Yamane, 1973) with a 95% confidence level and ±5% sampling error. In turn, a total of 400 responses were expected.

By using multi-stage sampling, this research started with a Stratified Sampling technique to divide samples into four equal groups from four different midscale hotels in Bangkok. Then, a convenience sampling has been used to collect data from 100 customers at each hotel. A convenience sampling is a non-probability technique which is less expensive and less time consuming when compared with other sampling techniques (Aaker, Kumar, & Day, 2004), and thus is particularly suitable to this research given its resource limitations.

Next, data have been collected through self-administered questionnaires from customers staying at midscale hotels in Bangkok. The survey instrument was developed based on the concept of service quality (SERVQUAL). SERVQUAL scales used in this research are shown in the next section below.

SERVQUAL Scales

The first part of the questionnaire is dimensions related to service quality, based on a review of the literature on SERVQUAL. This section was designed to measure the respondents' perceptions regarding the service quality. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) indicating 'Very low' to (5) indicating 'Very high', hotel customers were asked to rate their level of expectation (before) and perception (after) of the following SERVQUAL items which have been adapted from Boon-itt and Rompho (2012):

- Tangibles: The hotel has visually appealing facilities; Materials associated with services are adequate (soap, shampoo, towel, etc.); and Hotel staff appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming).
- Reliability: Hotel staff provide consistent services; Hotel staff keep accurate records (reservations, etc.); and Hotel staff perform the services right from the first time.
- Responsiveness: Hotel staff are always willing to serve customers; Hotel staff are always available when needed; and Hotel staff provide prompt service.
- Assurance: Hotel staff have knowledge to provide information and assistance to guests in areas they would require (shopping, museums, places of interest, etc.); Hotel staff have in-depth occupational knowledge (professional skills, foreign language, communication skills, etc.); and Hotel staff instill confidence in guests.
- Empathy: Hotel staff give guests individualized attention that makes guests feel special; Hotel staff understand the specific needs of guests; and the hotel provide flexibility in services according to guest demands.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Windows Version 22.0 (SPSS) program to analyze the findings. In order to achieve the stated objectives and to test the hypotheses, various statistical techniques were employed.

Firstly, descriptive statistical methods were used to examine the demographic profile, together with the expectation and perception toward service quality of midscale-hotel customers in Bangkok. Secondly, an Independent-Samples T-Test, together with One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi Square were used to analyze the relationship between customers' demographic profiles and customer expectations & perceptions toward midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality. Thirdly, the Paired-Samples T-Test was employed to identify whether there were significant gaps between customer expectations & perceptions toward service quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the overall sample is 400, the number of usable questionnaires was 325, which is a response rate of 81.2% (325 out of 400). The majority of respondents were male (52.6%), married (49.8%), with the age between 25-35 years old (34.8%). A large number of respondents were European (37.5%), followed by Asian (32.9%), North American which includes those from the United States and Canada (14.5%), and Oceanian which includes those from Australia and New Zealand (10.2%). In addition, most respondents were in the bachelor-degree level (58.2%), and worked as employees (52%), with an average monthly income of 1,501 – 3,000 USD (30.8%). Results from the hypothesis testing are shown below.

Hypothesis 1

This research found no support for hypothesis 1. To begin with, there is no statistical relationship between customers' demographic profile and customer expectations toward midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality. Nonetheless, there is a significant relationship between customer expectation and education level. Unpredictably, customers with doctoral degree have lower levels of expectation than those with Bachelor degree, Master degree, and High school.

Whilst a number of authors (e.g. Clow, Kurtz, Ozment, & Ong, 1997; Markovic et al., 2013) have suggested that hotel customers form their expectations based on a number of factors such as the hotel's promotional activities and previous experiences, this research found no significant relationship between customer expectation and sources of information, which includes promotional tools such as website, billboard, etc. In addition, there is no relationship between customer expectations and their frequency of stay at midscale hotels in Thailand or outside Thailand. There is also no relationship between expectations and the purpose of stay.

Hypothesis 2

For hypothesis 2, there is no significant relationship between customer perceptions towards service quality and demographic profiles. In terms of customer's travel behavior, this research found no significant relationship between customer perceptions and their frequency of stay at midscale hotels in Thailand. In addition, there is no relationship between perceptions and the purpose of stay.

However this research has found that customer perceptions have a relationship with their frequency of stay at midscale hotels outside Thailand. Customers who have stayed at midscale hotels outside Thailand more often appeared to have lower levels of perception than those who have stayed less often. This supports various studies (e.g. Laws, 2004; Markovic et al., 2013) in that customers' perceptions of service quality may, to a large extent, be influenced by the degree of their prior experience with a particular service.

Hypothesis 3

Support for hypothesis 3 is found in this research as there are significant service quality gaps between customer expectations and perceptions toward midscale Bangkok hotels (p<0.01). From customers' perspectives, the gaps between expectations and perceptions explicitly reflect the service quality of the hotel. A positive gap (+) means the service quality of the hotels is good and the hotels deliver services that are better than expected, whilst a negative gap (-) means the service quality of the hotels is poor and the hotels deliver worse services. A zero gap (0) means the service quality of the hotels satisfies the customer needs (Boon-itt & Rompho, 2012).

In table 1, the overall mean score of customer expectation is at a high level (4.04) whilst customer perception is at a very high level (4.43). In addition, the overall level of perception of each service quality (SERVQUAL) dimension was higher than the level of expectation. This positive gap indicates that customers are satisfied with the services. Tangibles were found to be the most important dimension with the highest positive gap (0.44). This means that tangible evidence, such as the hotel's visually appealing facilities, materials associated with the services, and neat staff uniform, has an impact on customer satisfaction.

Table 1: Service quality gaps

SERVQUAL Dimensions	Expectation (E)	Perception (P)	SERVQUAL Gaps (P − E)
Tangibles	3.99	4.43	0.44
Reliability	4.07	4.47	0.40
Responsiveness	4.14	4.53	0.39
Assurance	4.01	4.36	0.35
Empathy	4.01	4.37	0.36
Overall mean score	4.04	4.43	0.39

By employing the Paired-Sample T-Test to identify whether such service quality gaps were significantly different, this research has found statistical differences between expectations & perceptions in all service quality dimensions (Sig. = 0.000, $p<0.05$). Such a positive gap (Perception - Expectation) means the customers have received a significantly higher service quality than expected. Details are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Paired-Sample T-Test of service quality gaps

SERVQUAL Dimensions	Mean Differences	S.D.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Tangibles	0.440	0.631	12.562	324	0.000*
Reliability	0.403	0.678	10.720	324	0.000*
Responsiveness	0.387	0.738	9.441	324	0.000*
Assurance	0.356	0.686	9.352	324	0.000*
Empathy	0.361	0.729	8.931	324	0.000*
Overall mean score	0.389	0.602	11.659	324	0.000*

Note: *significant at $p<0.01$.

The importance of tangibles, as a part of the service quality dimension, is endorsed by a number of authors (e.g. Laws, 2004). Sriyam (2010), in particular, has examined the service quality of front office staff at a midscale hotel in Pattaya, Thailand. In Sriyam (2010)'s study, the tangibles dimension, particularly the staff's appearance, was ranked at the highest level when compared with other service quality dimensions. Moreover, it was highlighted that tangibles dimension was the best predictor of overall service quality.

Rauch et al., (2015) has explained that service delivery may not be as highly expected by guests of midscale hotels, as these travelers have made a conscious decision to select a mid-scale property, may have lower expectations relative to service delivery and may simply be more concerned with the service environment and service product versus the pampering they may receive from hotel personnel.

Nonetheless, this research has different findings when compared with the study conducted in Thailand by Vatjanasaregagul (2007) in that there was no statistical difference between the expectations and perceptions of service quality on all five SERVQUAL dimensions. It should be pointed out however that Vatjanasaregagul (2007)'s study was conducted with customers of four and five star hotels in Thailand, whilst this research was conducted with customers of midscale (three and four star) hotels in Bangkok.

Findings in this research also contrast with those in Boon-itt & Rompho (2012)'s study which measured the service quality of boutique and business hotels in Bangkok. Their study found that the service quality of hotels in Thailand was moderately low. In turn, they found that hotels were not able to deliver services as expected as the customer's perception is lower than the expectation.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Firstly, customers' perception of service quality is related to their frequency of stay at midscale hotels overseas (outside Thailand). Simply put, customers who stayed at midscale hotels overseas more often appear to be less satisfied than those who have stayed less often.

Such an issue could derive from the fact that midscale hotels lack a unique selling point and provide similar products and services (Pathnadabutr, 2012). In turn, customers who frequently stayed at midscale hotels are less excited by those services, and therefore midscale hotels need to provide a 'wow factor' which enhances the customers' perception toward service quality. For example, the hotel could offer a personalized greeting for each customer, and provide fresh flowers or a present in the guestroom. Doing so would increase the customers' perception of 'value for money', which would certainly exceed their expectations.

Secondly, there are significant positive gaps in service quality delivered by midscale hotels in Bangkok. This means those hotels have exceeded their customers' expectations. Although 'tangibles' has the highest positive gap, it should be pointed out however that 'assurance' and 'empathy' are two of the least positive gaps. To enhance the 'assurance' aspect, hotels should provide a staff training on product knowledge, foreign languages, and communication skills. This would empower their staff to gain a higher level of trust from the customers. In addition, 'empathy' can be improved by coaching the staff on how to deliver personalized services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

A large number of respondents in this study were European (37.5%), followed by Asian (32.9%) and other regions. Nonetheless, Grant Thornton (2016) has reported that 47% of hotel guests in Bangkok come from Asia, followed by 16% from Europe. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies employ a quota sampling technique to ensure that the respondent's profile correlates with the profile of hotel guests in Bangkok.

CONCLUSION

This research has achieved its aim by examining the influence of midscale Bangkok hotels' service quality gaps. Its findings have illustrated that there are significant positive gaps in service quality delivered by midscale hotels in Bangkok, and its managerial implications have suggested that midscale hotels in Bangkok should emphasis their staff training on individualized services, product knowledge, foreign languages, and communication skills. In turn, it is envisaged that this research have contributed to better management of service quality for the midscale hotel segment, and potentially for the tourism industry in general.

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