# Understanding Golf Tourists' Perceptions toward Service Quality, Golf Course Image, Perceived Value, and Golfer Satisfaction based on Demographics for Golf Tourism in Thailand

Salakanan Panthasupkul\* Wasin Phromphithakkul\* School of Management, Shinawatra University\*

#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify any significant differences in golf tourists' perceptions of service quality, golf course image, perceived value and golfer satisfaction based on demographics for golf tourism in Thailand.

This study utilized a convenience sampling method to collect data from six golf courses in Chonburi province, Thailand. Questionnaires were given to each golf tourist at the reception area of the golf course. Each of six golf courses was allotted 200 questionnaires, which were distributed by field workers. From the 1,200 questionnaires distributed, 352 were usable. Golf tourists included 67% male and 33% female. Korean was the nationality of 33% of golf tourists with 19% from Japan, and 13% from Singapore. This study used ANOVA to test for significant differences in golf tourists' perceptions toward service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction based on demographics of gender, age, nationality, education, and annual income.

The research results were indicated that 1) There were significant differences among golf tourists' perceptions regarding service quality (assurance) and golf course image with gender. Female golfers were significantly more satisfied with service quality (assurance) and golf course image than male golfers. 2) There were significant differences among golf tourists' perceptions regarding service quality (assurance), perceived value, and golfer satisfaction with nationality. Golfers who spoke Japanese were significantly more satisfied with service quality (assurance), perceived value, and golfer satisfaction than golfers who spoke English, Korean or other languages. 3) There were significant differences among service quality (reliability and assurance), golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction with their education. Golfers with master and doctoral degrees were significantly more satisfied with service quality (reliability and assurance), golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction than golfers with high school diplomas. Findings regarding the educational level of the golfers indicated that 60% of the golfers had a master or doctoral degree.

**Keywords:** Service Quality of the Golf Course; Golf Course Image;

Perceived Value of Golf Tourists' Perceptions; Golfer Satisfaction,

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#### Introduction

Thailand Incentive Convention Association or TICA (2017) has given information of golf tourism in Thailand that thousands of tourists fly into Thailand every year just for the golfing opportunities offered in the country. Destination diversity and the choice of golf courses throughout the country are key factors attracting the large numbers of visitors coming to play golf in Thailand where the most popular destination for golfing in Thailand especially for tourists is Chonburi Province (Wikipedia, 2018). There are over 20 courses in Chonburi province and all 20 are within a 45 minute drive from the popular tourist spot of Pattaya and hence why Pattaya was named Asia's best golfing destination of 2012. Other notable courses include Laem Chanbang International which was designed by the great Jack Nicklaus and Bangpra International known locally as the monkey course. Chonburi province has some of the most renowned golf courses in the whole of Thailand, namely Siam Country Club Old Course where hosting to the Honda LPGA events for the last 5 years and Amata Spring Country Club where hosting to the PGA tournaments and Thailand Golf Championship (Birdie Thailand, 2018).

The recent applauses given to the country has been an award by the World Golf Travel Agents Association or WGTAA to Thailand as the best up and coming destination for golf vacations.

The information from TAT during the event of Thailand Golf Travel Mart 2019 stated that Thailand is among the top destinations in Asia for golf with number about 700,000 golfers coming to Thailand each year which generated 3.3 billion baht in revenue for Thailand tourism industry in 2018 (TAT News, 2019).

Overwhelming golfer demand for golf products and services has become increasingly evident in recent years. The golf tourism industry in Thailand has been considered to be one of the main approaches to influencing market position strategy in an extremely competitive tourism market and for golf businesses to distinguish themselves. Therefore, in the academics, they have begun to pay more attention to golfer satisfaction and golfer loyalty in the golf tourism industry.

Golfer satisfaction has been viewed as an important issue for the golf tourism industry because of its impact on repeat business and word of mouth reputation. In reality, the golf tourism industry in Thailand has not always responded satisfactory to the golfers' demands for improvement. Understanding golf tourists' perceptions toward service quality, golf course image, perceived value and golfer satisfaction based on demographics could be useful for improving satisfaction of golf tourism in Thailand.

### **Research Ouestions**

- 1. How golf tourists' perceptions of service quality, golf course image, perceived value and golfer satisfaction differ significantly based on gender, age, nationality, education, and annual income?
- 2. What are the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction?

# Research Objectives

- 1. To identify any significant differences in golf tourists' perceptions of service quality, golf course image, perceived value and golfer satisfaction based on gender, age, nationality, education, and annual income.
- 2. To propose and analyze the interrelationships among variables of service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction.

#### Literature Review

Golf market is like many niche tourism products that can play an important role in positioning a destination. The main of the literature that considers golfers equivalent to tourists is focused on satisfaction and value (Petrick, Backman, Bixler, & Norman, 2001; Petrick, & Backham, 2002b). Intentions to visit a destination of the golfers are also take part into a destination's brand which is the perceived in the tourist memory (Cai, 2002).

The results from the research on understanding golfing visitors to a destination by Hennessey, Macdonald and Maceachern (2008) stated that "the value and satisfaction with the golf courses played were high and consistent across the three golf categories of frequency of golf played was infrequent, moderate, and dedicated but there is no indication that this result would hold for other golf destinations, so this would be an interesting way to extend the research to other golf destinations. Do feelings of value and satisfaction vary across the three golf categories at other golf destinations? If so, that would be very useful for designing a satisfaction strategy for other golf destinations". Understanding golf tourists' perceptions toward service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction based on demographics in this study will be valued to the golf tourism industry in Thailand.

# Service Quality, Corporate Image, Perceived Value, and Customer Satisfaction in Tourism Industry

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) indicated that service quality is the difference between consumer expectations of service and perceived service. Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham (1995) demonstrated that customer satisfaction indices offer possibilities to value the profitability of various satisfaction attempts. Therefore, the potential relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction may be expected.

The perceived value is related to the price paid. The basic prediction is that when service providers increase their price to improve on service quality, they expect that consumer satisfaction will increase at the same time. Oliver (1980) demonstrated that these expectations are disputed to positively affect customer satisfaction because they serve in the evaluation process.

The measurement of customer satisfaction may be an important forecasting of consumer purchasing behavior. In general, this study will illustrate a framework of golfer satisfaction that describes the relationships among golf course image, service quality, and perceived value.

Image refers to the brand name and the kind of associations customers get from the product or company (O'Loughlin, & Coenders, 2002). Berman and Evans (1995) considered that the store image is the functional and emotional mix, that is, the prior experience of having contact with the organizations where includes new information such as advertising, word of mouth effect, and anticipate to meet expectations for the future that has a direct positive influence on satisfaction. Lee (2003) used the five significant factors of physical environment, contact personnel, quality of service, corporate identity, and accessibility to measure the corporate image construct.

Service quality considers the movement across the gap between customer perceptions and customer expectations. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) have defined service quality as a kind of attitude, the degree of difference between the expectation of service and actual perception. And used of factor analysis to deduct five dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy. Quality is a consumer's judgment about a product's or service's overall excellence or superiority (Petrick, 2004).

Quality is part of the process of forming satisfaction judgment in the hospitality industry (Petrick, 2004). Getty and Thompson's (1994) studies of the lodging industry illustrated that quality evaluation leads to a judgment of satisfaction. Fick and Ritchie (1991) studies perceived service quality in airlines, hotels, restaurants, and ski sectors, demonstrated the usefulness of

the SERVQUAL instrument to indicate the relative importance of expectations in affecting customer satisfaction.

Perceived value is the comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the product to the customer based on the cost (Zeithaml, 1988). Wyner (1998) demonstrated that perceived value comes from customers' value. Value is generated from the product or service itself or the relevant image and intangible or non-product experiences. Value is defined in relation to pricing as the difference between customer perceptions of benefits received and sacrifices incurred (Leszinski, & Marn, 1997).

# Relationship among Service Quality, Golf course Image, Perceived Value, and Golfer Satisfaction

The review of literatures of the relationship or the influences among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction were described for each variable as following:

# Influence of image on perceived value and golfer satisfaction

Kristensen, Martensen and Gronholdt (1999) provided a model suggesting that image may have a direct effect on value. Image refers to the brand name and the kind of relatedness customers get from the product, brand, and company (Johnson, Gustafsson, Andreassen, Lervik, & Cha, 2001).

In the research of the corporate image, Lee (2003) indicated that organizations should set standards that help to create a positive image with five factors including physical environment, contact personnel, quality of service, corporate identity and accessibility, to have a positive impact on repeat business.

# Influence of service quality on perceived value and golfer satisfaction

Quality has been shown to be a preceding of perceived value (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002). Value is positively affected by perceived quality (Anderson, & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell, 1992). Service quality has become an important topic because of its explicit relationship to customer satisfaction (Bolton, & Drew, 1991).

# Influences of perceived value on golfer satisfaction

Howard and Sheth (1969) have demonstrated that customer satisfaction is dependent on value and perceived value is the perceived level of product or service quality relative to the price paid. Previous research has demonstrated that the measurement of consumer satisfaction should be used in association with the measurement of perceived value (Oh, 2000;

Woodruff, 1997). Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha and Bryant (1996) found that price perceptions affect customer satisfaction.

# Methodology

The population for this study was the golf tourists who came to play golf in Thailand. There are approximately 250 golf courses throughout Thailand. But the most popular destination for golfing in Thailand especially for tourists is Chonburi Province, where there are over 20 courses (TICA, 2017). This study has been conducted with golf tourists who played golf in Chonburi Province.

Once the area of research had been decided, a convenience sampling of the golf courses in Thailand was used for this study. Laem Chabang International Country Club, Burapha Golf Club, Chee Chan Golf Resort, Phoenix Gold Golf and Country Club, Khao Kheow Country Club, and Pattavia Century Golf Club were selected for this study. The target sample of this study was the golf tourists who played golf in these six golf courses in Chonburi Province, Thailand.

A closed-ended questionnaire was designed to be self-administered. The survey instrument consisted of six major sections. 1) The first section examined information related to golf tourists who played golf in Thailand 2) Section two referred to perceived value 3) The third section focused on golfer satisfaction 4) Section four referred to golf course image 5) Section five focused on service quality 6) Section six examined golfers' personal data with five question items, including gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

Questionnaires were given to each golf tourist at the close of the process of payment. The field workers stood in front of the reception area to invite golf tourists who played golf to participate in this survey.

Each of the six golf courses was allotted 200 questionnaires, the total number of questionnaires distributed was 1,200. The number returned was 381, incomplete 29, a total of 425 refused the questionnaire when offered, therefore, the valid number of questionnaires was 352.

# Data Analysis Procedures

This study tested if there are any significant differences in demographics of gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income regarding to service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction of golf tourism in Thailand. Four hypotheses were tested to identify the significant differences.

- H1: There is a significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions with service quality (reliability and assurance) of golf tourism in Thailand based on gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income.
  - H1.1: There is a significant difference between service quality and gender.
  - H1.2: There is a significant difference between service quality and nationality.
  - H1.3: There is a significant difference between service quality and age.
  - H1.4: There is a significant difference between service quality and education.
  - H1.5: There is a significant difference between service quality and annual income.
- H2: There is a significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions toward golf course image of golf tourism in Thailand based on gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income.
  - H2.1: There is a significant difference between golf course image and gender.
  - H2.2: There is a significant difference between golf course image and nationality.
  - H2.3: There is a significant difference between golf course image and age.
  - H2.4: There is a significant difference between golf course image and education.
  - H2.5: There is a significant difference between golf course image and annual income.
- H3: There is a significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions toward perceived value of golf tourism in Thailand based on gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income.
  - H3.1: There is a significant difference between perceived value and gender.
  - H3.2: There is a significant difference between perceived value and nationality.
  - H3.3: There is a significant difference between perceived value and age.
  - H3.4: There is a significant difference between perceived value and education.
  - H3.5: There is a significant difference between perceived value and annual income.
- H4: There is a significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions toward golfer satisfaction based on gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income.
  - H4.1: There is a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and gender.
  - H4.2: There is a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and nationality.

- H4.3: There is a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and age.
- H4.4: There is a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and education.
- H4.5: There is a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and annual income.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program was used to process the responses of the returned questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were used to screen all variables. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis seven to ten. The demographics were as the independent variable, service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction were as the dependent variable. The results were tested to determine whether there are significant differences in demographics toward service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction. Post Hoc Test was tested to determine the differences between variables.

# Findings and Discussion

Golfers who responded to the questionnaire survey played golf on Saturday 22% and Monday 16% with other days of the week being about the same. About 62% of the golfers played one round, 28% of the golfers played two rounds at the golf course at the time they participated in this survey. The golf tourists presented six purposes of traveling including business 37%, tour group 29%, vacation 13%, visiting friends 12%, family reunion / event 8%, and independent travel 2%. For the category "Who paid for the green fees?", 37% of the golfers reported that green fees were paid by themselves 37%, travel agent 29%, and company 23%. When asked about whether the golfer received a special rate for green fees, 63% answered "yes" and 34% answered "no". For the "who chose the golf course" category, the majority of golf course choice was by yourself 36%, travel agent 26%, and company 23%. The percentage of golfers who had played one time at this golf course in the past was 42%, 33% of the golfers had never played at this golf course in the past, and 18% of golfers had played two times at this golf course in the past. The sample represented the perceptions of the golfers who had chosen the golf course based on past experience.

The golf tourists who played golf in these six golf courses included male 67% and female 33%. Korean was the nationality of 33% of the golf tourists, 19% were from Japan, and 13% was from Singapore. The age of golfers was 36-40 years old at 18%, 31-35 years old was at 17%, and 46-50 years old was at 16%. The majority of golf tourists had at least a 4-year college degree: 41% of a master degree, a doctoral degree was at 19%, and a 4-year college degree was at 11%. The annual income (before taxes) was under USD 50,000 at 22%, missing data was at 19%, USD 50,000-70,000 was at 19%, and USD 90,001-125,000 was at 19%.

# Hypothesis Testing: One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

This study was tested in determining whether golf tourists' perceptions of golf tourism in Thailand varied significantly due to gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) defined reliability as the activity to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

- 1) There was no significant difference between golfers' perception with service quality (reliability) based on their gender.
  - 2) There was a significant difference on service quality (assurance) and gender.

Female golfers had a higher level of agreement toward the quality of service (assurance) than male golfers.

- 3) There was no significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions with service quality (reliability) based on age of the golfers who responded.
- 4) There was no significant difference in golfers' perception with service quality (assurance) based on their age.
- 5) There was no significant difference among golfers with different languages on service quality (reliability).
- 6) There was a significant difference among golfers with different languages toward their perception of the quality of service (assurance).

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the Japanese speaking group, the Korean speaking group and other languages group were significantly different in terms of service quality (assurance). Golfers who spoke Japanese were more satisfied with the quality of service than golfers who spoke Korean and other languages.

7) There was a significant difference between golfers' perception with service quality (reliability) and degree of education.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the master degrees, doctoral degrees, and high school diplomas were significantly different in terms of their perception with the quality of service (reliability). Golfers with master degrees were more satisfied with service quality (reliability) than golfers with high school diplomas. Golfers with doctoral degrees were also more satisfied with service quality (reliability) than golfers with high school diplomas.

8) There was a significant difference between golf tourists' perceptions with the service quality (assurance) and degree of education.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the golfers with master degrees, doctoral degrees, and high school diplomas were significantly different in terms of their satisfaction with the service quality (assurance). Golfers with master degrees were more satisfied with service quality (assurance) than golfers with high school diplomas. Golfers with doctoral degrees were also more satisfied with the service quality (assurance) than golfers with high school diplomas.

- 9) There was no significant difference between service quality (reliability) and annual income.
- 10) There was no significant difference in golf tourists' perceptions with service quality (assurance) based on their annual income.
- 11) There was a significant difference on golf course image and gender. It meant that female golfers had a higher level of satisfaction toward golf course image than male golfers.
  - 12) There was no significant difference between golf course image and age of golfers.
- 13) There were no significant differences in perceptions of the golf course image and nationality of golfers who responded.
  - 14) There was a significant difference between golf course image and education.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the master degrees, doctoral degrees, and high school diplomas were significantly different in terms of their perception with golf course image. Golfers with master degrees were more satisfied with the image of golf course than golfers with high school diplomas. Golfers with doctoral degrees were also more satisfied with golf course image than golfers with high school diplomas.

- 15) There was no significant difference in the perceptions of the golf course image based on the annual income of the golfers.
  - 16) There was no significant difference in perceived value based on gender.
- 17) There was no significant difference in perceptions of the perceived value based on the age of the golfers who responded.
- 18) There were significant differences among golfers with different languages in terms of perceived value.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the Japanese speaking group, Korean speaking group, English speaking group, and other languages group were significantly different in terms of perceived value. Golfers who spoke Japanese were more satisfied with perceived value than golfers who spoke Korean, English and other languages. Besides, golfers who spoke English were more satisfied with perceived value than golfers who spoke Korean and other languages.

19) There was a significant difference between perceived value and education.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the master degrees, doctoral degrees, and high school diplomas were significantly different in terms of perceived value. Golfers with master degrees were more satisfied with perceived value than golfers with high school diplomas. Golfers with doctoral degrees were also more satisfied with the perceived value than golfers with high school diplomas.

- 20) There was no significant difference between perceived value and annual income.
- 21) There was no significant difference in golfer satisfaction based on gender.
- 22) There was no significant difference in golfer satisfaction based on age.
- 23) There were significant differences among golfers with different languages in terms of golfer satisfaction.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the Japanese speaking group, the Korean speaking group, English speaking group, and other languages group were significantly different in terms of golfer satisfaction. Golfers who spoke Japanese were more satisfied with golfer satisfaction than golfers who spoke Korean, English and other languages.

24) There was a significant difference between golfer satisfaction and education.

The Post Hoc Test indicated that the master degrees, doctoral degrees, and high school diplomas were significantly different in terms of golfer satisfaction. Golfers with master degrees were more satisfied than golfers with high school diplomas. Golfers with doctoral degree were also more satisfied than golfers with high school diplomas.

25) There was no significant difference in golfer satisfaction based on the annual income of golfers who responded.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

# Summary of findings

The findings of the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction are 1) Service quality (reliability and assurance) had a direct and positive effect on the image of golf courses in Thailand. 2) Service quality (reliability) had a direct and positive effect on perceived value and service quality (assurance) had no

effect on perceived value. 3) Golf course image had a direct and negative effect on perceived value of golf tourism in Thailand. 4) Golf course image had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction. And 5) Perceived value had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

In determining whether golf tourist' perceptions regarding golf tourism in Thailand varied significantly due to gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income, the conclusions were as following:

- 1) There were significant differences among golf tourists' perceptions regarding service quality (assurance) and golf course image with gender. Female golfers were significantly more satisfied with service quality (assurance) and golf course image than male golfers.
- 2) There were significant differences among golf tourists' perceptions regarding service quality (assurance), perceived value, and golfer satisfaction with nationality. Golfers who spoke Japanese were significantly more satisfied with service quality (assurance), perceived value, and golfer satisfaction than golfers who spoke English, Korean or other languages.
- 3) There were significant differences among service quality (reliability and assurance), golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction with their education. Golfers with master and doctoral degrees were significantly more satisfied with service quality (reliability and assurance), golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction than golfers with high school diplomas. Findings regarding the educational level of the golfers indicated that 60% of the golfers had a master or doctoral degree.

# Recommendations for golf course management

The managerial implications from the identifying significant differences in golf tourists' perceptions toward service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction of golf tourism in Thailand based on gender, nationality, age, education, and annual income are as following:

1) Female golfers were significantly more satisfied with service quality (assurance) and golf course image than male golfers. Service quality (assurance) refers to the abilities of caddies to convey trust and confidence. Golf course managers are encouraged to train their caddies to build professional knowledge regarding to the services provided. Golf course managers are also encouraged to pay more attention to not only visible materials, such as the design of the club house, golf course, and food presentation, but also the interactions with the golfers, including during the reservation system for booking tee times. Those improvements may attract more golfers, especially female golfers, who have a higher level of satisfaction of service quality (assurance) and golf course image than male golfers.

2) There were significant differences between service quality (assurance), perceived value, and golfer satisfaction with nationality. Golfers who spoke Japanese were more satisfied with service quality (assurance) and perceived value of golf courses in Thailand than golfers who spoke English, Korean or other languages. The reason may be because of Japanese living expenses are higher than golfers from some other countries. Japanese golfers consider that the amount they paid for Thai products and services were more worthwhile, so Japanese golfers have a higher level of satisfaction.

Golf course managers may reevaluate their target customer and the strategy of market positioning, if they realized that most of their golfers come from Japan. They may develop or improve some services and facilities to fulfill the needs and wants of the Japanese golfers. For example, golf courses might provide Japanese foods and sauna rooms. Golf course management may offer caddies' training programs on the Japanese language. Golf course management may design a language card in which caddies receive a stamp when they complete the assigned language classes. The more stamps caddies received, the more opportunity they could be promoted.

3) Golfers with master and doctoral degrees were significantly more satisfied with service quality (reliability and assurance), golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction than golfers with high school diplomas. Golf course managers are encouraged to learn about the wants and needs of golfers with higher levels of education and focus on the strategy of customer loyalty, especially for golf tourists with high education.

#### Recommendations for future research

Information about additional independent variables may be of value to golf tourism industry. This study could be replicated and the sample of golf courses could be expanded. Qualitative methodologies such as case studies, observations, in depth interviews and focus groups might be used to build upon this preliminary research effort.

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